



Mixed planting under trees in a drier site Including *Dryopteris erythrosora* (left front), *Dryopteris cycadina* (centre back) and *Cyrtomium fortunei* (right front).



A large specimen of *Dryopteris affinis* 'Stableri'



A polypody in winter foliage

The British Pteridological Society  
For Fern Enthusiasts

Further information is obtainable from:  
[www.ebps.org.uk](http://www.ebps.org.uk)

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Some further reading:

Indoor ferns: caring for ferns.

Boy Altman. (Rebo 1998)

House Plants

Loren Olsen. 2015.

Gardening with Ferns

Martin Rickard (David and Charles)

From Timber Press:

Encyclopaedia of Garden Ferns

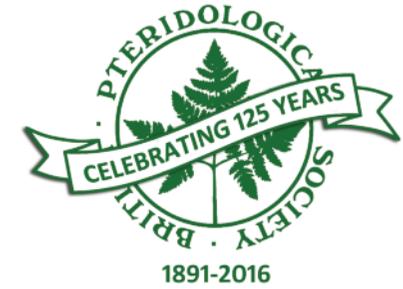
Sue Olsen

Fern Grower's Manual

Barbara Hoshizaki and Robbin Moran

The Plant Lover's Guide to Ferns

Richie Stefan and Sue Olsen



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Ferns for Drier Conditions

RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2016

## Ferns for Drier Conditions

These are just a few of the ferns that will grow in drier places. Cultivars are offspring that have been selected and propagated to display special features, a Victorian passion!

British native ferns:

*Asplenium scolopendrium* Hart's tongue and cultivars  
*Dryopteris affinis* Scaly male fern and cultivars  
*Dryopteris dilatata* Broad buckler fern and cultivars  
*Dryopteris filix-mas* Male fern and cultivars  
*Polypodium* species Polypody. Many cultivars available  
*Polystichum aculeatum* Hard shield fern  
*Polystichum setiferum* Soft shield fern and cultivars

Foreign ferns:

*Adiantum aleuticum* Aleutian maidenhair fern  
*Adiantum venustum* Himalayan maidenhair  
*Cyrtomium falcatum* House holly fern  
*Cyrtomium fortunei* Fortune's holly fern  
*Cyrtomium macrophyllum* Big-leaf holly fern  
*Dryopteris cycadina* Shaggy wood fern  
*Dryopteris erythrosora* Autumn fern  
*Dryopteris sieboldii* Siebold's wood fern  
*Dryopteris wallichiana* Wallich's wood fern  
*Polystichum acrostichoides* Christmas fern  
*Polystichum munitum* Western sword fern  
*Polystichum proliferum* Mother shield fern  
*Polystichum vestitum* Prickly shield fern



HARTS-TONGUE SPLEENWORT

*Scolopendrium vulgare*

## Ferns for Drier Conditions

Ferns are welcome plants to have in the garden due to their architectural forms and attractive new growth in spring, often as unfurling 'croziers'. Most are remarkably trouble-free to grow providing the correct site is chosen and the plants are well-established. There may be areas of a garden, under trees or at the foot of walls, where rainfall is low and there is restricted light where ferns tolerant of drier conditions can bring an appearance of freshness and greenery.

Most ferns grow in shade or semi-shade and need a moist compost and a humid environment typical of light woodland. However, there are some ferns that will tolerate drier conditions if they are not in full sun or subjected to strong winds, which reduce the humidity level and dry the fronds. Some of these ferns (epiphytes such as Polypodies) are adapted to live in drier conditions on rocks or trees where moisture levels can fluctuate widely. However, in general, the ferns listed here prefer a moisture retentive compost, especially when they are becoming established in their first year. It may also be necessary to water newly planted ferns for the first summer and to be aware that further watering may be needed as new foliage is being produced, and in times of drought. Drought can be a particular problem if ferns are planted under trees that have very superficial roots, such as willow, or if other water-hungry plants grow around them, such as ivy.

The ferns listed here are only a few of those that can be grown in drier conditions but they should be readily available from garden centres and fern specialists and should be easy to grow without becoming invasive. In addition, all are hardy in the UK and will tolerate frost and snow. Other suitable ferns may be more difficult to find or have more specific soil requirements to grow well, especially the acid-alkali balance (pH). These ferns can be found in the suggested reading on the back of this leaflet, on the BPS website (eBPS.org.uk) or in other BPS leaflets.

All the ferns in this list will retain their foliage during the winter, although this may be discoloured or torn by extreme weather. Some cultivars have very attractive leaf forms but are more brittle than the original species and need a site protected from damage by wind or passers-by. Most generate new leaves in the spring but some, such as the polypodies, grow new leaves in the late summer and autumn and are better for their appearance in

winter than summer, when they may have few or no leaves. Some ferns produce attractive new spring foliage in red or bronze that turns green as it matures, *Dryopteris erythrosora* is a good example.

Ferns are generally pest-free and will look after themselves once they have become established. However, new fronds may be susceptible to attack by slugs and snails although mature fronds are unlikely to suffer. There are a few other recently-introduced pests that can spoil the appearance of ferns but not threaten their life. One is the fern leaf-miner which creates brown patches on affected leaves and the others are fern caterpillars and vine weavils, both of which can eat the softer ends of the fronds. Fern spore moth larvae can create unattractive mounds of spores as a protective nest on the back of fertile fern fronds. If infestations of any of these pests are severe and appearance is paramount, biological and chemical methods of control are available but the latter should be used with care and following the instructions as ferns can be damaged by some insecticides.

For an attractive display, companion planting is helpful to introduce colour to the many shades of green that ferns provide. There are many flowering plants that will tolerate drier shady sites, among which are the *Vincas*, and the *Geranium* family. Butcher's broom (*Ruscus*) has attractive, long-lasting winter berries. Other suggestions are made in the further reading on the back of this leaflet.

Ferns may be grown in pots and containers, which will need full or dappled shade to avoid drying out too quickly. Also, the elevation that a pot provides lifts the fern out of the relatively high humidity environment at ground level. Those ferns that will tolerate these conditions are particularly the polypodies and the *Polystichum* and *Dryopteris* families. The British native ferns, *Dryopteris filix-mas* (the male fern) and *Dryopteris affinis* (the scaly male fern) may live for years in pots with virtually no care apart from watering in spring and at times of drought. They will develop multiple crowns and can be very impressive on a shady patio. In general, it is best not to have mixed planting with potted ferns as the more rapidly growing flowering plants or ivies will compete for both water and nutrients, to the fern's disadvantage.