

# The Garden



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## Bedecked with blossom

Anna Pavord chooses her favourite  
flowering trees for spring

Tulip drama at  
Pashley Manor

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from your kitchen  
garden this year

Ferns are a speciality of Fibrex Nurseries near Stratford-upon-Avon. Here holding *Matteuccia struthiopteris* is Angela Tandy (far right), who co-runs the nursery. Roy's fern is less-well-known *M. orientalis*.



ROY LANCASTER VISITS...

# Fibrex Nurseries

This established Warwickshire nursery is well known for its extensive and diverse range of hardy ferns, many of which make elegant garden plants

Author: **Roy Lancaster VMH**, plantsman and author.  
Photography: **Tim Sandall**

I have known Fibrex Nurseries for more years than I care to remember and still retain vivid memories of their exhibits of ivies and pelargoniums staged at RHS London Shows. My visit to their nurseries at Pebworth, near Stratford-upon-Avon in May last year was not, however, a case of déjà vu.

I was there to see their equally impressive collection of hardy ferns. On arriving at the nursery, the sight that greeted me on entering a large shade tunnel proved revitalising: it reminded me of the cool, green floor of a temperate rainforest.

## **Ferns from around the globe**

Exploring the tunnel it soon became apparent that I was looking at a rich array of ferns from places as far afield as New Zealand, Australia, North and South America, Europe and Asia. Here were exciting wild species as well as the most elegant and curious of garden cultivars. My guide was the irrepressible Angela Tandy who runs >>

the nursery with her brother Richard, her sister Ursula and sister-in-law Heather. Angela has special responsibility for the ferns and the ivies, and it was soon clear that she has a close affinity with them.

Conveniently, the ferns are set out at ground level allowing one to admire them from above, the better to appreciate their garden contribution. First off was *Adiantum venustum* AGM 1, a deciduous Himalayan plant which Angela described as tolerant of dry shade and super ground cover. Its elegant waves of arching fronds are normally deciduous except in mild sheltered situations. The new fronds, known as croziers, are pink. Totally different is *A. aleuticum* AGM with bold pedate fronds that comprise a long dark stalk (stipe) supporting a fan-like arrangement of finger-like segments. More robust than *A. venustum*, it will form a large, elegant clump up to 24cm (9in) by twice as much across.

**Dramatic native**

Among the most dramatic of our native ferns is the evergreen *Asplenium scolopendrium* (hart's tongue fern) AGM. Its bold rosettes of strap-shaped fronds when grown in moist, shady, especially calcareous soils would not be out of place in a tropical rainforest. It is, however, hardy and easy and will freely spread about by spores in suitable conditions. Numerous kinds have been named over the years, such as those from *A. scolopendrium* Crispum Group AGM with narrow, wavy-margined fronds – on the day I was attracted to the

Roy and Angela discuss the merits of *Osmunda regalis* (right) among the boldest of UK native ferns. One of Fibrex Nurseries' fern-filled polytunnels (below).



yellow-green fronds of *A. scolopendrium* 'Golden Queen' 4 – but there are those with divided or crested fronds such as *A. scolopendrium* 'Ramocristatum' or plants of the Cristatum Group. Another native, *Athyrium filix-femina* (lady fern) AGM enjoys moist, even boggy conditions and is happy in sun or shade. Like many another fern it has a host

of cultivars – both elegant and curious – including ever-popular 'Victoriae' with slender criss-crossing and crested segments (pinnae), and 'Frizelliae' AGM whose pinnae are reduced to curious cluster-like tufts. I grown both in a shady border under our study window.

Completely different in its diminutive, creeping, carpeting habit is evergreen *Blechnum penna-marina* 5, native to New Zealand and Australia as well as South America. It is an excellent garden plant especially on moist, acid soils as well as in troughs or shallow containers.

Chinese *Cystopteris moupinensis* 3 is a more recent introduction. Its small, delicate, fragile fronds filled a large pot and Angela told me she had seen it in a garden forming a substantial colony in a moist shady site. I simply had to have it. Similarly colonising is native *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* (oak fern) AGM which I first saw years ago in a Scottish woodland. A pretty ground cover in shade, especially on acidic soils, it was here accompanied by the cultivar 'Plumosum' AGM, a more luxuriant selection, but equally easy and hardy.

I was not surprised to find the genus *Dryopteris* occupying a large space given >>

**Fibrex Nurseries**

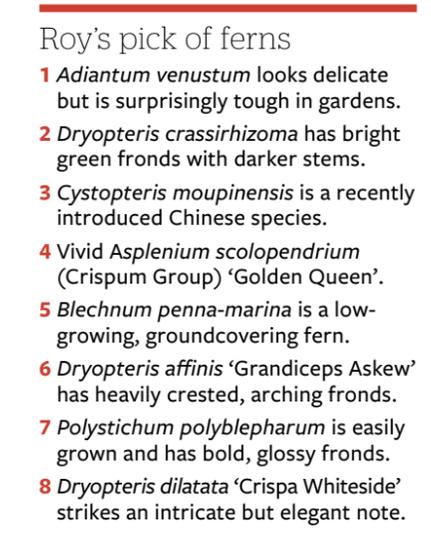
Honeybourne Road, Pebworth, nr Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 8XP; 01789 720788; fibrex.co.uk

**Mail order:** available. Also deliveries to shows.

**Catalogue:** can be requested by phone.

**Open:** 1 March–31 August, Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm; 1 September–28 February, Monday–Friday, 9am–4pm; (weekends during 'Pellie Season' only: 1 April–25 June, 10.30am–4pm).

**Accessibility:** site is wheelchair accessible.



Roy's pick of ferns

- 1 *Adiantum venustum* looks delicate but is surprisingly tough in gardens.
- 2 *Dryopteris crassirhizoma* has bright green fronds with darker stems.
- 3 *Cystopteris moupinensis* is a recently introduced Chinese species.
- 4 Vivid *Asplenium scolopendrium* (Crispum Group) 'Golden Queen'.
- 5 *Blechnum penna-marina* is a low-growing, groundcovering fern.
- 6 *Dryopteris affinis* 'Grandiceps Askew' has heavily crested, arching fronds.
- 7 *Polystichum polyblepharum* is easily grown and has bold, glossy fronds.
- 8 *Dryopteris dilatata* 'Crispa Whiteside' strikes an intricate but elegant note.

the number of species and cultivars available. Hardy and easy, they are principally clump formers and deciduous. I grow several and would not be without native *Dryopteris affinis* (golden-scaled male fern) AGM or even more dramatic *D. wallichiana* AGM, while *D. crassirhizoma* AGM **2**, which will form a large plant with golden-green young fronds, and *D. erythrosora* AGM with bronze-tinted young fronds and red spore clusters beneath fertile fronds, have long been favourites of mine.

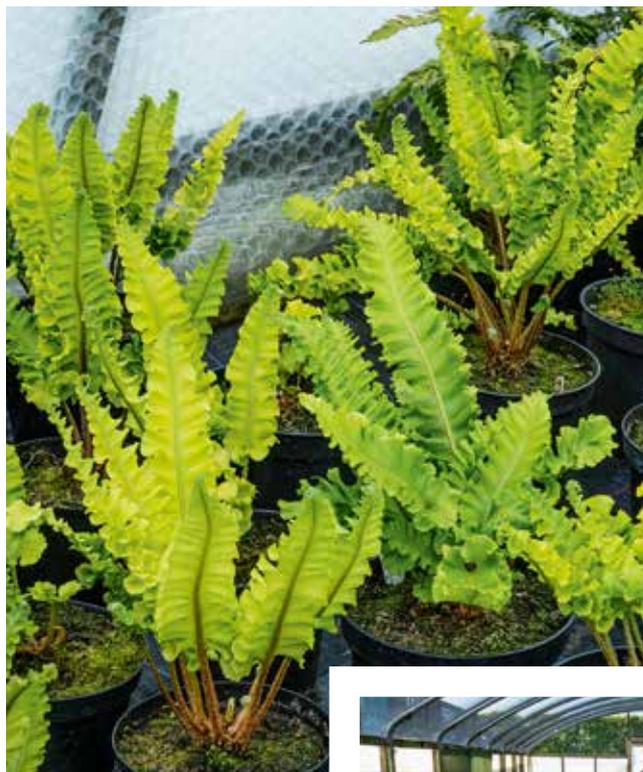
We saw *D. affinis* 'Grandiceps Askew' **6** with bold, heavily crested fronds, which can also be grown in a hanging basket, and *D. dilatata* 'Crispa Whiteside' AGM **8** with more crinkly fronds.

### Diversity to admire

We went on to admire *Polystichum* (shield ferns) which are almost as numerous as *Dryopteris*. UK native *P. setiferum* (soft shield fern) AGM is the source of a rich selection of cultivars. The late nurseryman Reginald Kaye used to say of ferns that once you get to know and grow them, their names 'trip off the tongue'. I was reminded of this when Angela pointed out to me one of the best selections: *Polystichum setiferum* (*Plumosodivisiolobum* Group) 'Hamlet' with fronds of great complexity. There are many others, all of which with age make a mound of multi-layered fronds desirable enough to be regarded by owners as living heirlooms.

Of the many *Polystichum* species grown by Fibrex I must mention Japanese *P. polyblepharum* AGM **7** with shining green, spreading fronds. Young croziers in spring are clothed with golden bristles, reminding Angela of donkeys' ears. I have grown this low-growing species for years and it is a favourite. I have several introductions of *P. neolobatum*, all with dark green, glossy, arching evergreen fronds of tough, almost prickly texture. My favourite of all is *P. munitum* (western sword fern) AGM from Pacific North America which develops clumps of ladder-like fronds which in my garden I remove at winter's end to allow new croziers to develop.

Well-known *Matteuccia struthiopteris* (ostrich or shuttlecock fern) AGM is ideal for wet sites where its creeping rhizomes produce extensive colonies. Lesser known is *M. orientalis* AGM which, as Angela says, is not a runner and produces handsome



*Asplenium scolopendrium* Crispum Group 'Golden Queen' (left) is a bright-fronded selection of hart's tongue fern. Entering the shade tunnel (below) at Fibrex Nurseries reminded Roy (below left) of 'the cool, green floor of a temperate rainforest'.



*'My nursery tour was an unforgettable journey...'*

clumps to 1m (39in) high of spreading fronds with densely scaly, brown stipes. It enjoys moist soils and a sheltered site – it was in such a place I first saw this fern in China's Sichuan province in 2012.

Equally bold is *Osmunda regalis* (royal fern) AGM, the largest UK native fern. Angela showed me several selections including 'Purpurascens' with deep purple stipes, especially when young, and initially purple fronds that mature green. This deciduous species also provides rich tints as fronds fade in autumn. Its performance on an acidic preferably wet soil is best demonstrated in lakeside plantings such as at RHS

Garden Wisley and The Savill Garden.

One of the last ferns Angela and I discussed, *Woodwardia unigemmata* AGM is good for a woodland garden. It has spreading, evergreen fronds with a propensity to form plantlets at their tips if in contact with soil. In my garden I detach and pot on plantlets as gifts. It is worth growing for the exquisite deep red of the new fronds and is quite hardy.

My nursery tour was an unforgettable journey among some of the hardy-fern world's star performers. In Angela, who knows her ferns like she does her family, I could not have had a more knowledgeable guide. ●