



Dividing Garden Fern Clumps

Ferns spread in several different ways, by spores, plantlets on the stems of the fronds or by creeping roots (horizontal rhizomes). However, some garden ferns grow offshoots (crowns) immediately next to the main plant, forming a clump, and can become very large and crowded. This can be an attractive feature in a 'natural' garden, but division may be required either because of size or a desire to have more plants to spread around.

1. The best time of year to split a large clump of crowns is in the autumn, when the fronds have died back or are inactive. It may be possible to prise a crown away with a trowel, otherwise dig up the clump and prise the crowns apart by hand. If this is not possible, two forks pushed between crowns and levered apart may do the trick. Occasionally, it is necessary to use a large knife, saw, or spade to split the crowns from each other but try to keep some root-ball on all the separated pieces. Do not split the crown itself as that will usually result in the death of one or both pieces.
2. When the crowns are split from each other they will have lost some of their root-ball and will be in a weakened state until this has regrown. So, it is best to pot these in compost individually and keep them somewhere shady to recover for the spring. If, by necessity, a plant must be split whilst still in full-frond, it is particularly important to keep the plant in shade and to spray the fronds if they wilt. The potted crowns should be kept moist but not wet, to avoid rot.
3. The potted crowns can be planted out when they have shown good frond growth and must be watered regularly until growing normally again.