



Planting out a potted fern

Many gardeners rely on buying plants from garden centres, where plants are grown in large numbers in glasshouses or poly-tunnels with artificial feeding, watering and light. Ferns grown in this way will often appear large, glossy and green when seen in the centre but may then die or do poorly when planted out in the garden, where the conditions are very different to what they are used to. There are a few ways in which their chances of survival can be improved.

1. Many potted ferns are pot-bound and have existed on daily watering and, possibly, foliar feeding. Remove the pot and see if there is more than one plant. Often commercial ferns have been started from plugs of multiple young ferns and may be very crowded. If there is an easy way to split these plants apart then try to do this without damaging the roots. If the plant has become really pot-bound (i.e. the roots have taken up the shape of the pot), gently tease the roots apart, otherwise leave the root-ball undisturbed. Soak it in a bucket of water for a few minutes.
2. Choose an appropriate place to plant your fern and dig a hole more than the size of the root-ball. Line this hole with good quality soil with some added humus or compost for moisture retention. If the soil is dry, water the hole before planting the fern. Pack compost around the fern to the level of the top of the root-ball. Do not bury the crown of the plant.
3. Keep the fern shaded if it is in an area where direct sunlight hits it for any part of the day. A piece of hessian supported on two canes and placed on the south side of the plant should do the trick.
4. Water the newly planted fern regularly, ideally with rainwater, if you have it.

Plants bought from specialist nurserymen at plant fairs will usually be smaller, individual and less likely to do badly.