

Ferns for Central Coast Gardens

Ferns can add a lush beauty to your garden or home. Dating back to the Carboniferous period, some 350 million years ago, ferns are one of the oldest plant forms.

On the Central Coast there are many beautiful ferns indigenous to this area.

Why not try some of these ferns:

- in your garden,
- indoors,
- in a hanging basket,
- in or near a water feature.

What is a fern?

Ferns belong to a group of non-flowering plants that include algae, mosses and liverworts.

From large tree ferns such as *Cyathea*, to the tiny delicate Maidenhair Fern, *Adiantum*, ferns have one thing in common. They all produce spores.

What growing conditions do ferns like?

Most ferns prefer a cool, moist position in light dappled shade, protected from strong winds.

Generally ferns like a soil containing plenty of organic matter. Heavy mulching around the root area will keep the roots cool and prevent water loss. A free draining mix should be used for plants grown in pots or baskets. Ferns grown indoors should be kept away from direct sunlight, draughts and heaters.

Do ferns have any pests or diseases?

Generally ferns are not troubled by many pests or diseases. However, slugs and snails can sometimes be a problem, as can scale, insect pests and mealy bug. If your plants suffer from any of these problems, consult your local nursery, as treatment of these pests is constantly being improved and updated.

Where do ferns grow?

Ferns can be found growing as:

- epiphytes sometimes attached to a tree high up in the canopy. The tree is used for support and the fern is not parasitic on the host.
- terrestrials where the fern grows on the forest floor in rotting leaf litter.
- lithophytes with the fern growing on rocks.
- aquatics such as *Azolla* and those that are semi-aquatic such as *Marsilea*. These ferns have developed tiny scale-like fronds that enable them to float on the water

Knowing the origin of a fern will help you select the right fern for the right spot. Observe where the ferns grow naturally in the bush. Try and replicate this aspect in your garden.

How do I grow my epiphytes?

These ferns can be attached on:

- tree trunks in your garden,
- timber boards,
- a log,
- hanging baskets.

Beware, do not attach an epiphyte to a tree that will lose its bark or by wrapping wire or rope around the whole tree circumference, as this will kill the tree.



Asplenium australasicum, Birds Nest Fern

Some local ferns to grow in your garden

Planted in the right spot in your garden, these local ferns will prove hardy.

Adiantum aethiopicum, Common Maidenhair Fern. Looks delicate but it is easy to grow. This fern will sucker profusely. It does not like full shade.

Adiantum formosum, Giant Maidenhair. Has an attractive, long black stem to 1m tall and dark green lacy fronds. Vigorous growth from a long creeping rhizome.

Adiantum hispidulum, Rough Maidenhair. Has finger-like fronds with pink new growth.

Asplenium australasicum, Birds Nest Fern. With erect fronds up to 2m, forming a rosette.

Blechnum cartilagineum, Gristle Fern. Forms a large clump up to 1.5m high. Light green fronds with rosy pink new shoots.

Blechnum nudum, Water Fern. Forms a bright green rosette of fronds to 1m. Likes a moist position.

Cyathea australis, Rough Tree Fern. Is very hardy in almost any garden situation. Will grow in full sun if given plenty of water.

Cyathea cooperi, Scaly Tree Fern. Is fast growing. Trunk patterned with oval scars left by fallen fronds. Can be grown in full sun if the roots are kept moist.

Davallia pyxidate, Hare's Foot Fern. A creeping fern which has dark green leaves up to 1m long. The prominent hairy rhizome resembles a hare's foot and often runs above ground or over rocks.

Dicksonia Antarctica, Soft Tree Fern. A popular tree fern that develops a soft fibrous trunk. This fern needs plenty of water in hot weather.

Doodia aspera, Prickly Rasp Fern. Is very hardy, fronds to 50cm, with new growth an attractive reddish colour. Suckers into a large colony.

Microsorium scandens, Fragrant Fern. A lovely scrambling fern that will climb over rocks or tree trunks.

Pellaea falcata, Sickle Fern. Has a creeping rhizome with shiny dark green fronds to 60cm.

Platycterium bifurcatum, Elkhorn Fern. Popular fern developing many small plants to form a large clump.

Polystichum proliferum, Mother Shield Fern. Grows easily in all but poorly drained soils, to 1m. Forms plantlets near the end of the fronds. Peg them down and allow to form roots before detaching from main plant.

Pteris tremula, Tender Brake. Is fast growing with erect fronds to 1m. Will not tolerate full shade.

Pyrrhosia rupestris, Rock Felt Fern. Easily grown small fern found growing on rocks and tree trunks.

Todea barbara, Austral King Fern is a large fern with fronds up to 1.5m and with age will develop a trunk. Slow growing.

Some suggested reference books

"Australian Ferns and Fern Allies", D.L Jones & S.C Clemesha, Reed Books, Sydney.

"Australian Ferns - Growing them Successfully", C.Chaffey, Kangaroo Press, Sydney.

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