

## Native Ferns

Consider adding native Ferns to your garden!

Ferns are the perfect perennial for those shady, damp, hard-to-fill spaces, or areas where grass has succumbed to moss. Ferns come in variety of shapes and sizes, are low maintenance, resistant to deer, and are virtually disease/pest free. In addition, Ferns will provide diversity of form and a feeling of cool tranquility to your landscape.

Ferns are an ancient group of plants dating back 300 million years. They are most closely related to mosses and liverworts. They never have flowers or fruits but instead reproduce by spores, typically produced on the lower side of the fronds or on specialized spore-bearing fronds.

In the wild, Ferns play an important ecological role, both in water-retention and in stabilising mobile surfaces such as landslips, slopes and sand dunes. Ferns also provide shelter and habitat for other species, including a remarkable diversity of invertebrates in the moist soil below --an integral part of the food web in a rich environment.

Each species of Fern has its own preferences for temperature, soil type, moisture, pH, light levels, etc. In fact, in the wild, Ferns are so remarkably reliable in their occurrence with regard to the conditions they prefer, that scientists often use them as “indicator species” for mapping plant communities and measuring environments at the micro level. This baseline information is valuable for further research and habitat management.

There is an abundance of native Ferns from which to choose. The “Michigan Flora” website, maintained by University of Michigan Herbarium, lists 48 species of Ferns native to Michigan. Many native Ferns prefer light to moderate shade, moist conditions, and soil rich in organic matter. But others thrive in limestone-rich soils or upland dry areas. There are Ferns for just about every condition you encounter in a garden. Some favorites natives include: Cinnamon Fern, (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), Interrupted Fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*), Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum petatum*), and Sensitive Fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*).

Ferns have a complex reproduction cycle, so the easiest way to get more is simply to divide them. They are also available at local garden centers, although native species can be difficult to find. Beware of purchasing non-native Ferns that are invasive including: Japanese Climbing Fern, Azolla or Mosquito Fern, Bracken Fern, New York Fern, and the Old World Climbing Fern. For those who wish to try propagating ferns from spores, the American Fern Society maintains a collection of fresh spores available at a nominal fee.

More information and photos available at:

[homepage.mac.com/chpeirce/ferns/index.html](http://homepage.mac.com/chpeirce/ferns/index.html) (*Michigan Fern Index*)

<http://michiganflora.net/maps.aspx> (University of Michigan Herbarium)

<http://www.amerfernsoc.org/> (American Fern Society)