



# Indoor Fern Care

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Ferns are special plants. Fossil records show that they date back to the Paleozoic era, 400 million years ago. Not only have ferns been around for millions of years, but they've adapted to nearly every climate and environment on Earth. One can find ferns in alpine areas and in the deserts of the world, in ponds and in lakes, on the ground and high in trees, and in temperate and tropical climates.

Many plant lovers shy away from ferns because they are considered hard to grow. But growing ferns can be quite simple, if you follow a few basic guidelines.

## **HUMIDITY**

Ferns must have humidity, something there is little of in modern homes. You can humidify your ferns by filling a saucer or tray half full with gravel and letting the plant pot sit on top of the gravel. Keep a little water in the gravel at all times. Do not let the water level reach high enough to touch the bottom of the pot. If your potted fern is placed in a decorative planter, you can stuff moist sphagnum moss between the pots to moisten when necessary.

Ferns do best in areas not heated to more than 72 degrees. Temperatures from 60 to 65 are ideal. Keep ferns away from drafts.

## **Watering**

If possible, use distilled or rain water. When tap water is used, draw the water and let it stand a few hours before using. Do not pour water over the fern foliage (This applies to ferns in hanging baskets, as well.) If you water your hanging basket fern by immersing it in water, do not let water touch the foliage. Fern baskets hanging outside should be in complete shade and be protected from wind. Good drainage is very important for ferns

because the soil should be kept moist at all times.

## **LIGHT**

Although ferns are associated with shady, moist gardens, this does not mean that they need low light indoors. Ferns require bright indirect light for their best indoor growth. Place your ferns in bright windows. A window with an eastern exposure is best; south and west windows can be veiled by sheer curtains for fern culture. Do not move your plants too far from these windows (no more than 2 to 3 feet away), as this reduces the light tremendously.

## **PEST CONTROL**

Should you find it necessary to use an insect spray on your ferns, you may use insecticidal soap, a non-chemical insect control. Be sure to follow the label directions for mixing.

## **SOIL**

Ferns can be grouped according to their natural habitat. For this reason, we have classified them as epiphytic (growing in trees), terrestrial (growing in soil), or as aquatic (growing in water).

Epiphytic ferns need coarse soil that allow rapids and thorough drainage and rich in organic matter leaf mold, sphagnum moss, or peat moss. With the proper soil mix, they can be planted in hanging baskets or pots. Epiphytic ferns can also be mounted on logs, slabs, plaques or mats. Ferns like the Staghorn and the Polypodium "footed ferns" are examples of epiphytic ferns.

Terrestrial ferns, the largest group of ferns, will grow in normal potting soils. Usually, the mix should contain peat moss, perlite for added drainage, and maybe some sand for added weight.

Terrestrial ferns can be planted in hanging baskets, pots, or tubs. Boston ferns and their many varieties and Maidenhair ferns are examples of terrestrial ferns.

Aquatic ferns are usually found floating in or at the edges of ponds and lakes. They are suitable for outdoor koi ponds, aquaria, and patio container water gardens. The water clover, *Marsilea Quadrifolia*, is a good example of an aquatic fern that can adapt to soil. The widespread mosquito fern, *Azolla caroliniana*, which sometimes covers hundreds of square feet as a single colony, is an example of a free floating water fern.

### **FERTILIZING**

Potted ferns should be fed monthly from March to October. Ferns growing in hanging baskets should be fed every two weeks. Using organic fertilizers, fish emulsion being one of the best, will ensure that you do not burn your ferns. Water soluble fertilizers also give superior results, if the manufacturer's directions are followed