

Ferns for All Locations in the San Joaquin Valley

by Betty Coffelt, UC Master Gardener



Ferns with their arching fronds and cool green colors are great for that part of your garden where there is little sun. But if you have a sunny yard - don't despair! There are ferns that will do well in the sun in our valley. In fact, there are ferns for all locations whether planted: indoor or outdoor, in sun or shade, or outdoor (in the ground or a pot).

Tip # 1: Fern basics.

Outdoor ferns, whether in a pot or in the ground need well drained soil. They like moisture, but not wet feet. Indoor ferns need high humidity, bright light, moist, but not soggy soil.

Tip #2: There are three basic types of ferns.

1. Crown forming - fronds emerge from a stout rhizome in form of a vase.
2. Rhizomatous - produce fronds along a rhizome without forming a crown.
3. Rock ferns - grow best tucked tightly among rocks often horizontally.

Tip #3: Each type of fern is planted in a slightly different way.

Crown ferns - plant with the crown flush with the surface - **never below**.

Rhizomatous ferns - plant by laying the rhizome in a shallow trench. Cover with soil and firm.

Rock ferns - plant into rock gardens or dry stone walls. Remove a stone, plant the fern on its side, add leaf mold or potting mix, and replace stone.

Tip #4: Fern maintenance.

Winter - In late winter or very early spring when fern just starts to produce new growth, cut off all old growth.

Spring - Once weather has warmed, apply bone meal to ground & cover with mulch. Best time to divide established clumps is mid-spring.

Summer - Water. Don't let the roots dry out. Ferns can be planted in summer, but more care is required to make sure the roots don't dry out.

Fall - Outside, place 2-3" of mulch around base. Spring and fall are both good times to plant ferns, but spring is best.



This information courtesy of:

University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Tulare-Kings Co.

Have a gardening question? The UC Master Gardeners offer free information on gardening. Call anytime and we will return your call.

Tulare: (559) 684-3325 & (559) 684-3326 Hanford: (559) 852-2736



Tip # 5: Choose the right fern for the right location.

	Type	Fern Type	Height	Comments
 Outdoor-Sun	Asparagus fern		1 to 5'	takes full sun and is easy to grow
	Foxtail	Crown	1 to 2' tall	will take sun, but afternoon shade is helpful
	Sprengeri		3 to 6' tall	bright light to some sun
	Sprengeri compacta	Crown	to 3'	bright light to some sun
	Setaceus		2' in pot	bright light to sun, much taller in ground
	Tree fern	Crown	3 to 4' tall	takes full sun
	Leather fern	Rhizome	to 3'	full sun if well watered, afternoon shade helpful
	Sword fern	Rhizome	to 2½'	full (or morning?) sun to shade
 Outdoor-Shade	Maidenhair ferns		to 18"	many varieties, hardy
	Sword fern	Rhizome	to 30"	tender*; can become weedy
	Cinnamon fern	Rhizome	to 2-3'	hardy
	Australian tree fern	Crown	to 20'	hardy
	 Indoor	Boston	Rhizome	6" to 3'
Bird nest		Crown	1 to 3'	minimum to moderate
Button		Crown	1'	medium

*Tender ferns grown in our area work well in pots. They can spend 8 - 9 months a year outside, but need protection in the winter under a patio cover or indoors.

Tip #6: Combine ferns with complimentary plants.

Ferns with their shadings of green to gray, and their feather to bold foliage mix well with other plants

Sun ferns combine with: Bulbs, low growing blooming annuals, gerbera daisy, roses & gazania

Shade ferns combine with: Hosta, bleeding heart, impatiens, begonias, and columbines.

Tip #7: Weedy ferns.

Some ferns can become weedy or overtake a small area, especially asparagus ferns, sword ferns, and leather ferns.

If you need to limit the spread of your fern, keep it in a pot. If you want it in the ground you may pot in a plastic pot and bury the pot with the top of the pot being at ground level. If you have the time and inclination, you can also dig up or divide the fern when it reaches the maximum size you need and want.