

Polystichum acrostichoides - Christmas Fern (*Polypodiaceae*)

Polystichum acrostichoides gets its common name from the evergreen fronds that are sometimes used in holiday decorations. Christmas Fern can tolerate more sun than some other Ferns if it is provided with adequate soil moisture. However, best growth will occur in shade or partial shade.

General Comments on Ferns: Ferns are among the most adaptable of plants for residential landscapes. They are ideal for groundcover or border plantings in shady areas of the landscape. Ferns are an ancient type of vegetation that occupied the world long before the evolution of seed-producing plants. They are strictly foliage plants, since they reproduce without flowering. Most ferns used in midwestern and northeastern landscapes are shade-loving woodland types, although there are sun tolerant Ferns available through specialty catalogs. They will thrive best if located near trees, or on the east or north side of a building, where they will receive partial shade. Woodland Ferns may grow quite poorly if subjected to hot afternoon sun. Ferns start growth very early in the spring, and retain their delicate leafy foliage until several light frosts freeze them back in the autumn. They are quite free from disease or insect pests, and thus are easy to grow in the native gardens or border plantings. Woodland Ferns grow best in a soil which has a high humus content, almost pure leaf mold is ideal. The average garden soil may be made suitable for Ferns by adding liberal quantities of peat moss or compost.

FEATURES

Form

- medium fern (foliage perennial)
- to 2' tall x 2' wide
- upright clump of radiating fronds

Culture

- partial shade to full shade
- performs best in moist, rich, deep, well-drained, organically-supplemented soils in partial shade
- Christmas Fern is among the more tolerant Ferns to stress, but it should not be sited in full sun
- propagated primarily by crown division, but also by spores
- Polypody Family (the largest family of Ferns), with few disease or pest problems (crown rot can occur in poorly drained soils)
- moderately available in container form

Foliage

- pinnately compound
- unfurling in mid-spring as green fiddleheads
- leaflets not dissected, instead, they are serrated and have a basal flair on one side, thus resembling Santa's boot
- semi-evergreen



Flowers

-not applicable

Fruits

-not applicable

Twigs

-not applicable

Trunk

-not applicable

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Function

-a low-growing accent foliage perennial for shady conditions found at north- or east-facing foundations, under large trees, in woodlands, or at the border; also effectively used in shady portions of Japanese gardens

Texture

- medium-coarse texture
- average density

Assets

- dark green fronds
- partial to fully shaded sites
- one of the tougher ferns that does reasonably well under heat and drought
- foliage semi-evergreen (evergreen in southern zones)

Liabilities

-none

Habitat

- Zones 3 to 8
- Native to Eastern U.S. and Canada

SELECTIONS

Alternates

-other plants for full shade or dappled shade situations, including ferns (*Athyrium*, *Matteuccia*, *Osmunda*, *Polystichum*, etc.), perennials (*Astilbe*, *Brunnera macrophylla*, *Hosta*, *Pulmonaria*, *Stylophorum diphyllum*, etc.), or groundcovers (*Gaultheria procumbens*, *Hedera helix*, *Mitchella repens*, *Symphytum grandiflorum*, *Vinca minor*, etc.)

Variants

-the species form is the only type commercially available