



A New Look at an Ancient Plant

What kind of plant has branched stems and leaves, neither flowers nor seeds, can grow in a variety of locations and has been with us for more than 300 million years?



FERNS! They are an immense and diverse group of plants that are more versatile than many people may think. Not all of the many ferns hardy to our Zone 5 climate need be pictured as only woodland delicacies. Many varieties are suitable for, believe it or not, rock and water gardens as well as sunny and dry locations. I have personally seen happy colonies of Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia pensylvanica*) and Japanese Painted Fern (*Athyrium n. Pictum*) growing in full sun, provided (THIS IS IMPORTANT!) the soil is organically rich and consistently moist. A few more sun-tolerant varieties include the Hayscented Fern (*Dennstaedtia punctiloba*), Lady Fern (*Athyrium felix-femina*), and Cinnamon Fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*). When established, Ostrich, Lady and especially Hayscented Ferns will also be able to tolerate drier soils.

These ancient beauties can be deciduous or evergreen and exist in many textures, colors (think Japanese Painted Ferns and Autumn Ferns) and sizes. Even better, most are resistant to rabbits and deer. Their tropical look can soften up areas around a patio and the edges of hardscaped portions of the garden. They truly are worth a second glance, beyond the forest setting, as long as proper research is done to choose the correct variety that should be used.



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