

CREATE A FERN GARDEN

As summer approaches, think about incorporating a fern garden among existing trees and shrubs to create a vibrant, low maintenance and tranquil spot in the landscape. As always, planning is key. I begin with a scale drawing, such as the one below which illustrates a 10'x20' plot.

Our garden blueprint is planned so that taller plants, such as Australian Tree Ferns, will act as background and shelter for smaller ferns. This multi-tiered canopy of trees and plants will allow dappled light to come through, yet prevent direct exposure to afternoon sun. Ferns like to be planted close together. The fast growing Macho fern (*Neohrolepsis biserrata*) looks great in mass plantings. Its lush foliage, with 2'-4' glossy, dark green fronds, makes it a popular landscaping plant.

Remember that ferns thrive in shade, so don't hesitate to use them in spots where other plants failed to grow. However, site selection is important in terms of water availability, humidity and drainage. Even our well-drained, sandy soil will benefit from improvement with peat moss and organic matter to ensure it holds adequate water without retaining too much salt.

In general, soil depth of 12 to 18 inches is sufficient for small- to medium-sized ferns, including the Giant Maiden Hair Fern and the Wart Fern. Fast growing and decorative, Maidenhair ferns (*Adiantum*) have a fine billowy texture and attractive black stalks. Wart Ferns (*Polypodium scolopendria*) have leathery pinnate fronds, 2' to 3' long, with bumpy spores, which give this fern its name.

Tree ferns will do better with 24 inches of soil. The Brazilian Tree Fern grows in a rosette shape with coarse, crinkled fronds. New fronds create a colorful accent as they present red before they unfurl. The Australian Tree Fern is a rapid grower with broad, bright green fronds that are finely cut and spread from a slender trunk. Give this specimen plenty of room to spread its lush, exotic beauty in your garden.

I've included cap rock in this drawing since limestone helps provide important nutrients. Also, try accents with large stones, boulders or river rock. Elevated beds with these amended media create good aeration while keeping the surrounding soil cooler. In all areas, use mulches to reduce evaporation and ensure a high-humidity factor. Finally, incorporate a small water feature to boost humidity as well as add sound in your private garden.

