

Fern foliage great for all seasons

Non-flowering plant provides multiple colors, great-looking border around the home



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Ask a Master Gardner

Question: My property borders a wild, natural landscape. I haven't been able to do anything in this area because I cannot figure out how to transition from this wildness to my garden. Also, because of the large trees in that area, it is very shady. I love order and symmetry. Any solution?

Answer: This sounds like a lovely area, and the first thing that comes to my mind are ferns. A wide, curving border with shade-loving, lush ferns showing off their lovely, graceful fronds would make a nice transition from the wildness of the neighboring property to the symmetry and order of yours. Ferns are one of the best plants for shady areas, have many varieties to choose from, are easy to grow and need minimal care.

Ferns are one of the few species of plants that do not flower. Spores, found underneath their leaves, is their means of reproduction. They come in sizes from just a few inches to six feet and also boast a multitude of green shades. The autumn fern is only green in the summer. It is coppery-pink in spring, green in summer and copper in the fall. They also grow in places other than the ground. You will find some varieties that grow in the forest canopy, in between rock, on rocks, on trees.

In your border, I would plant several different types of ferns because some are perennial and some are evergreen. Also, for a varied and beautiful effect, combine your ferns with other



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Autumn ferns are semi-evergreen, with foliage turning a coppery-pink color in spring, green in summer and copper in the fall.

shade-loving plants like Hosta, caladiums, liriop and columbine.

Ferns, in general, prefer more acidic soil. Test your soil prior to planting. Contact the Master Gardeners for soil testing. If your soil is not acidic, you may remedy that several ways. You may add peat moss or organic material (cured manure) to quickly increase acidity. You may want to add elemental sulfur, but that can take up to six months to acidify the soil. Also, you may wish to make your own. To make your own, mix peat moss and sand at a 3:1 ratio and then mix that with fresh soil.

When planting, dig a shallow hole approximately the same width as the current pot they are in. Plant your fern 1 to 2 inches above ground level and apply mulch.

With the right soil, ferns need minimal care.

After assuring the soil conditions are right, make sure to mulch regularly. This will help retain moisture in the soil. As ferns prefer moist soil, you will need to water during dry periods. Some ferns will tolerate dryness but it is not optimal. The maidenhair fern, however, is one that will definitely not tolerate dryness.

The following are some of the hardier ferns to try: Southern maidenhair fern, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, is very delicate-looking but extremely hardy. Male fern, *Dryopteris filix-mas*, is evergreen, can grow up to 5 feet and likes wet soil. Autumn fern, *Dryopteris erythrosora*, is semi-evergreen with foliage turning a coppery-pink color in spring, green in summer and copper in the fall. Lady fern, *Athyrium filix-femina*,



Lady ferns are drought-tolerant and can provide growth up to 3 feet.

is drought-tolerant with growth to 3 feet. Christmas fern, *Polystichum acrostichoides*, is a slow grower that resembles the Boston fern.

With such a variety of

ferns to choose from, you're sure to find a few to add interest and charm to your shady landscape.

Do you have a gardening

question? Email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.