

# Ferns fine for many shady settings There's a lot new under the sun



**Garden Spot**  
Marty Fligley



Japanese painted fern is a popular specimen for the shady garden.

Ferns, which have been on Earth since the age of dinosaurs, are flowerless and reproduce by spores. Many years ago they were thought to have all sorts of supernatural powers because of this. They could bestow invisibility, reveal hidden treasure, and more.

The interest in ferns began in Britain in the 1800s, when wealthy British gardeners had the land and the time to devote to plants.

They hunted ferns in their woods and brought them back to their own fern gardens and the craze continued.

Shirley Hibberd, a British garden writer, wrote about ferns and their popularity continued to rise.

He wrote about the resulting fern gardens, fern grottos: "It is truly a garden with gravel walks amidst rocks and waterfalls, and on every hand the ferns present themselves in sheets of delicious verdure or in waving palm-like masses, or in a glorious confusion of brake and laetrea intermingled as if the dryads themselves attended to the planting."

Maybe the craze for ferns isn't so strong now, but they are becoming more popular, and I believe it's because they require little care and fit in most any shady garden setting.

My favorite fern is the Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium japonicum* "Pictum"). Its beautiful, fringed, soft green, leaf trilobed with reddish purple midribs are gentle yet lively.

There are other forms of this fern, namely the crested form and those with especially good color. Some have differing degrees of red or gray or even metallic tones that seem to shine with importance. Once

in a while you can find a green form that is a natural form and quite lovely.

Grown from the spores the ferns may not be the same as the parent, just as plants raised from seed will differ unless especially bred to be the same.

The color of Japanese painted ferns is best when they are grown in light shade; too much sun will cause the color to fade.

There are a lot of plants that grow well and complement and are complimented by ferns such as bluish-green hostas, white variegated ivy, and blue yucca. Also pink astilbe, wild ginger and many other hostas.

It needs woodland conditions with dappled or heavy shade; most, well-drained soil high in organic matter.

It does well in a rock garden situation where the roots can run through the soil under the stones.

Give it space near the front of a border; you won't want to miss the beauty.

To form increasing clumps, divide the ferns in the spring. Just use a spade and cut through the middle of the plant and then again to get four new plants.

Each should, and probably will, have several growing tips. Set them about 12 inches apart.

Ferns die back in the winter, so it's a good idea to remember or mark where they are grow-

ing in order to avoid disturbing the rhizome when you divide them.

Ferns and grasses seem to go together, too, and Horitech of Spring Lake, Mich., has some interesting news!

A new little grass was discovered on the grounds of this company, growing among Japanese silver grass that has all green leaves and reaches up to 8 feet tall.

The new find, "Little Zebra," reaches a mature height of 3 to 4 feet, making this a true dwarf.

Its striped yellow horizontal bands remain vibrant all summer long. In late summer it flowers with reddish purple plumes.

*Miscanthus sinensis* "Little Zebra" likes sun and is excellent for rock gardens, for ornamental grass gardens and as a large scale ground cover. You may find it at all Bordines, Goldner Walsh in Pontiac, Telly's in Troy, all English Gardens, Shemin Nurseries, Anglin in Novi, Plymouth Nurseries and Four Seasons in Oak Park.

**GOODGARDEN TIP**  
If shrubs and trees have suckers growing at the trunk, remove them with sharp clippers.

Marty Fligley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

BY MARY KLEMIC  
STAFF WRITER

Nothing new under the sun? That isn't the case when it comes to outdoor accessories. Examples - available locally - are screen doors for the garage, and decks and patio furniture made from recycled milk jugs.

Frank Pace of Macomb developed Fresh Air Screens after a visit to Florida. The screens let fresh air and sunlight into a garage while keeping out bugs, pests and dust. Pace has one on his garage at home.

"People stop all the time," he said.

The double-stitched screen has zippers for easy entry, and allows high visibility. It doesn't interfere with opening and closing the garage door, and can be rolled up when not in use.

"I think this is the best thing since sliced bread," a customer from Ohio wrote.

The screens can be installed on gazebos, decks, patios, boats, carports, porches, campers and trailers as well as on garages.

"As long as you have a frame you can put it anywhere," Pace said.

The screens come in 16 different sizes - eight for heights of 7 feet, eight for heights of 8 feet. Prices for the 7-foot height range from \$89 (for 6 by 7 feet) to \$125 (for 18 by 7 feet). Prices for the 8-foot height range from \$94 (for 6 by 8 feet) to \$133 (for 18 by 8 feet). Screens can be custom cut, from 3 by 4 feet to 18 by 12 feet.

Installing the screen takes about 30 minutes. After that, it takes about one minute to put it up or take it down. To install the screen, three strips of hoop and loop material, 7/8-inch roofing nails, a hammer and a step ladder are needed. The hoop and loop material and nails are provided.

In addition, 1/2-inch conduit or 1/2-inch fiberglass can be used as a weight for the bottom to help keep it against the floor



Lars/David Inc. in Davidsburg carries EcoSmart™ patio furniture, which is made from recycled milk jugs.

and from swaying in the breeze. The weight can be placed in the pouch sewn into the bottom.

The screen can be washed with mild soap and water.

For more information, visit [www.garagedoorscreens.com](http://www.garagedoorscreens.com). To order, call (888) 419-4886, Ext. 8639, or e-mail [space@mi-mls.com](mailto:space@mi-mls.com).

### RECYCLED MATERIAL

Lars/David Inc. in Davidsburg is the exclusive Michigan distributor of EcoSmart™ furniture and accessories from By The Yard Inc.

EcoSmart items, made from recycled plastic milk jugs, are guaranteed not to crack, break or peel.

By The Yard, based in Minnesota, uses 350 jugs to make a rocking chair.

"Forget all your preconceived ideas about plastic," said Debby Anderson, By The Yard president. "EcoSmart furniture is as heavy-duty and attractive as wood, but requires no maintenance whatsoever. It's the perfect answer for people who want stylish patio furniture that always looks as good as new - without the hassle of taking care of it."

The EcoSmart furniture line includes rockers, chairs, tables, benches, swings, gliders, chaise lounges and planters, all in a

variety of styles. Colors are white, cedar brown, hunter green and charcoal gray.

Among the prices are \$249 for a folding chair, \$336 for an Adirondack rocker, \$611 for a chaise lounge with arms, \$199 for a 31-inch cafe table and \$936 for a 46-by-85-inch oval table.

Lars/David also carries maintenance-free boards and posts by Renew Plastics™ that are made from recycled type 2 high-density Polyethylene.

The material comes in standard colors of white, cedar, brick, redwood and weather-wood, and custom colors are available.

It can be used by do-it-yourselfers, or Lars/David also can put customers in touch with a network of builders.

The cost is about 1/3 more than conventional material, but carries a 20-year warranty. It is protected from flaking, fading, cracking and warping.

"This material is going to last forever," said Damon Michelsen, Lars/David owner. "Nothing absorbs into the material."

For information, visit [www.larsdavid.com](http://www.larsdavid.com) or call (248) 625-9501.

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