

## **FERN (OUTDOOR HARDY)**

As gardens mature and overhanging tree canopies thicken, the search for more shade tolerant plants continues to increase. Due to this ongoing quest, there has been an increasing diversity of ferns brought to market. There are many different heights, textures, and colour selections available for your garden/landscape. Some are also evergreen and, depending on snowfall, can be enjoyed all winter long. Provided they are sited properly, once established, most are very easy to care for.

### **LOCATION**

Dappled-light conditions are best for growing ferns. Proper soil preparation is also critical to long-term success with any plant. Amend the existing soil with several inches of compost, composted manure, shredded leaves and/or or premoistened peat moss. Turn this soil over to a depth of 8 to 12 inches minimum. Organic matter will improve the moisture and nutrient retention of sandy soils and improve the drainage in clay soils. Soil amendment is especially important for clay soils as the soil does not generally provide enough oxygen for fern root growth.

Although many ferns will grow well under trees, be aware that competing tree roots can rob the soil of moisture. Most plants in this situation must have added irrigation. Regular, deep watering will greatly help, as will a regular topdressing of shredded leaves or compost. This mulch will help maintain moisture, keep the roots cool and provide continued nutrition to the soil as it breaks down. Although the soil should drain well, it must never be allowed to get totally dry.

### **PLANTING**

When planting a newly purchased fern, dig a hole slightly larger than the rootball of the fern, mix in some bonemeal and add water to the hole. Gently loosen the roots to allow them to spread. Plant the fern at the same level as it was growing in the pot, making sure the crown, (the center of the plant), is slightly elevated. Water well to remove air pockets in the soil and follow this up with a "Plant Start" 5-15-5 fertilizer to encourage healthy root growth. Maintain regular, deep watering, for the rest of the season, especially during dry spells. Ferns will show drought stress by browning at the tips and wilting.

### **FERTILIZER**

Ferns do not require any fertilizer, other than the regular, annual addition of compost.

### **WINTER PROTECTION**

Cover newly planted ferns with shredded leaves or evergreen boughs, in the winter, to help insulate and protect them. Spring-cleaning should be done by hand as rakes can cause damage to roots and emerging fronds (leaves). Carefully cut away old fronds and remove all debris before the fronds begin to unfurl.