

# Research Ferns For The Home Garden

Recently I received questions about growing, culture and propagating of ferns.

Ferns are low maintenance, lacy, beautiful additions to almost any garden. Although many species of ferns prefer wet sites, some fern species can be found in just about any location in North Carolina. Ferns are a common native invader of gardens in the coastal Carolinas. It seems many of you are budding pteridologists and don't even know it.

Pteridology is the study of ferns. According to the experts approximately 135 species of native ferns can be found in North Carolina. I often hear gardeners talk about the practice of removing ferns from the wild to their garden. If you are one of these gardeners, please take the time to learn about fern identification and culture.

Most of our native ferns have very exacting habitat requirements and home gardens are often death traps for these ferns.

One of the best books I have ever come across for fern identification is more than 30 years old. *The Fern Guide*, by Edgar T. Wherry, was published in 1961 by Doubleday and Company. Reprints can be obtained through the Morris Arboretum, University of Pennsylvania, 9414 Meadowbrook Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa. 9118. This small handbook allows an amateur to easily identify a fern plant, describes the native

## THE PLANT DOCTOR

C. BRUCE WILLIAMS  
Extension Area  
Turf Specialist



habitat in which the plant will most likely be found, and briefly reviews suitable garden culture techniques needed to grow the plant.

Some of the ferns you may want to try for your garden include the evergreen Wood fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*), Interrupted fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*) Royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*), Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) and Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia pennsylvanica*).

The Ostrich, Royal, interrupted and Cinnamon ferns require very moist conditions to really excel. The evergreen Wood fern and the Christmas fern do well in dry sites with slightly acidic soils. The Sensitive fern prefers wet, acidic soils. However, the vigorous growth of this fern can sometimes choke out other ferns in the same site.

Most ferns can be easily propagated by dividing the woody rhizome

that grows just in the soil or humus layer. Take special care not to disturb the root system and remove as much soil with the plant as possible.

In general, ferns are slow to establish, but when they do become established, watch out. Ferns can take over your woodland garden, actually crowding out other desirable ornamental plants.

Ferns are primitive plants and do not produce seed. Spores are produced in small, pencil-point size structures under the leaflets on the frond. These spores fall from the plant and will germinate on a suitable environment to produce a small plant (called a gametophyte or prothallium) upon which sexual fertilization occurs. The new fern plant grows from the fertilized egg on the prothallium.

Gardeners have been growing and selecting for unusual types of fern plants through spore culture for well over a hundred years, but to be successful you must thoroughly understand the environmental requirements for growth.

Before running for the woods, check with local plant nurseries. Many nurseries and garden centers carry a wide selection of pteridophytes, or ferns.

Send your gardening questions and comments to *The Plant Doctor*, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia, N.C. 28422.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## Knights Of Columbus Donate

Knights of Columbus Council 9039 recently donated \$1,500 in proceeds from its annual golf tournament to local charities and businesses. Pictured (from left) are Clete Waldmiller of Knights of Columbus, Laney Blanton of Lower Cape Fear Hospice, Cathy Swaim of Hope Harbor Home and William Magnus Hewett of the Autumn Care Residents Council. Waldmiller said the Knights also donated to Ocean Trails Convalescent Home and Boy Scouts of America to provide scouting opportunities to local handicapped children. The Knights also raised more than \$3,200 last year for the Interagency Program at Brunswick Community College.

## MISS VIRGINIA 1991

### Sheri Huffman To Sing At The Miss Brunswick County Pageant

Sheri Huffman, Miss Virginia 1991, will be the featured entertainer at this year's Miss Brunswick County Scholarship Pageant, to be staged Saturday, Feb. 6, at 8 p.m. at Hatch Auditorium on the campus of the N.C. Baptist Assembly in Caswell Beach.



HUFFMAN

At the 1991 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, N.J., Huffman was named the most talented non-finalist for her vocal rendition of the song "If I Can Dream," which she plans to sing at the Miss Brunswick County pageant. She also will perform "When You Wish Upon a Star" and "My Funny Valentine."

Huffman was crowned Miss Lynchburg in 1990 and, after winning the preliminaries in talent and swimsuit competition, was first runner-up to Miss Virginia in 1990. Competing as Miss Amherst County, she was crowned Miss Virginia 1991 after winning the preliminary talent competition.

A native of Hampton, Va., Huffman, 25, is an honors graduate of Christopher Newport College with degrees in marketing and communications.

As Miss Virginia, Huffman was a spokesperson on wellness issues for the Virginia Department of Health and is currently living in Atlanta, Ga., where she is the continuing medical education representative for the A.H. Robbins Pharmaceutical Co.

The Miss Brunswick County Scholarship Pageant is an official Miss America preliminary pageant sponsored by Scholarship Pageants of Brunswick County, Inc., a non-profit civic organization. The winner will represent Brunswick County in the 1993 Miss North Carolina Pageant in June.

Also highlighting this year's event will be a musical performance by the reigning Miss North Carolina, Heidi Williams. She is a classical

soprano who has been a featured soloist in performances by the North Carolina Symphony and the Raleigh Symphony.

Mistress of ceremonies for the pageant will be Miss South Carolina Nancy Humphries, a native of neighboring Horry County, S.C. A preliminary swimsuit winner in the Miss America Pageant, Humphries is the morning news anchor for WCBD-TV in Charleston, S.C. She was recently named Tri-County South Carolina's Young Career Woman of the Year.

The reigning Miss Brunswick County is Crystal Williams of Leland, a sophomore at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Miss Brunswick County makes approximately 60 personal appearances annually across the southeast as a representative of the county.

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