

Ferns Versatile House Plants Too

One of the most attractive and versatile house plants is the fern. Depending on the variety, ferns do well indoors in the winter and on shaded porches or patios in the summer.

Considering the total number of fern species in the world, a relatively few species of fern do well with pot culture.

Perhaps the best known of all the indoor ferns is the "Boston" fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*). During the coldest winter months, the long delicate fronds and olive-green foliage make the Boston fern a centerpiece in any indoor location. However, the Boston fern is best appreciated in the spring and summer when utilized on shaded patios or porches. The Boston fern is represented by a hundred or more varieties which are primarily differentiated by the degree of frond "lacininess" and plant size.

The Bird's Nest fern (*Asplenium nidus*) produces a cluster of large wide fronds arranged around an open center. This fern requires cool temperatures (55 degrees to 75 degrees Fahrenheit) and relatively high humidity to really thrive. The low humidity and warm heat of the indoor environment of most homes in the winter will deal the "slow death" to this fern.

My personal favorite is the Staghorn fern (*Platycerium alcorniae*). The Staghorn fern is an epiphyte and needs no true soil mix for survival. Sphagnum moss, slabs of wood or bark, and osmunda fiber will provide an excellent support base for the unusual fern.

THE PLANT DOCTOR

C. BRUCE WILLIAMS
Extension Area
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In general, the Staghorn fern requires very little care but in order for the plant to survive high humidity is absolutely essential. A light misting with water one or more times a day will normally keep a Staghorn fern vigorous and growing in most indoor environments.

I have seen few adults and no children that could resist feeling the soft hairy rhizomes of the Rabbit's Foot fern (*Davallia fejeensis*). This fern is one of the best for hanging baskets and is relatively easy to culture.

Table ferns (*Pteris spp*) and Maidenhair ferns (*Adiantum cuneatum*) are beautiful common ornamental fern species but require abundant care and lots of humidity to really thrive.

Growing beautiful ferns is relatively easy so long as you follow a few basic rules. Use a shallow pot, a high organic matter potting soil, and find an indoor location that has cool nights (55 degrees) and warm humid days (75 degrees). A southern or eastern exposure window in a bathroom or kitchen is ideal.

Fertilize ferns with a one-fourth

strength concentration of a soluble houseplant fertilizer. In general, plan to fertilize your fern when day length is increasing and to discontinue fertilization when day length is decreasing.

Do not overfertilize ferns. These plants are very sensitive to fertilizer salt buildup and several applications of fertilizer solution over a spring and summer season should be sufficient for optimum growth and vigor.

Ferns prefer a moist but well-drained soil. Overwatering or allowing your plant to sit in water for long periods of time will surely cause fungal and bacterial rots or wilts. The best way to water a fern is to immerse the lower half of the pot in a bucket of water for a few minutes and then allow the pot to drain the excess water. Watering from the top of the pot is fine as long as the entire potting soil media is moistened and the pot drains. Water thoroughly when you water and only water when the soil feels dry to the touch.

Indoor ferns grow best outdoors in the indirect light of a northern exposure in the summer. For most ferns, an eastern or southern exposure window will give best indoor winter growth.

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



Heart Month Kick-Off

Bill Potts (second from right), chairman of the 1993 American Heart Association's Brunswick County residential campaign, hands out packets to team captains (from left) Allen Bellamy of Security Savings and Loan, Loretta Todd of Southern National Bank and Sara Estep of NationsBank at the kick-off of the "Dear Neighbor" campaign for National Heart Month. These captains and 16 others in the county have recruited 95 volunteers to write 15 letters each seeking contributions from friends and neighbors. The American Heart Association sponsors life-saving devices such as pacesetters, procedures such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation and medications through research grants. Those not receiving a letter but wishing to contribute should contact the American Heart Association, c/o Bill Potts, 1321 Marsh Line Court SW, Shallotte NC 28459.

Woman's Club Arts Festival Set Monday

The annual arts festival of the Shallotte Junior Woman's Club will be held on Monday, Feb. 8, at West Brunswick High School.

The public is invited to enjoy the Performing Arts Competition, be-

ginning at 6:45 p.m. At 7:45, the remaining artwork can be viewed.

Students from Waccamaw, Shallotte Middle and West Brunswick will be competing for recognition in numerous art categories such as mu-

sic, drama, public speaking, painting, sculpture, photography, literature, sewing and crafts.

Local winners will compete at the district level, and if successful there, will go on to state competition.

Black History Is Focus Of Program

Raymond Carl Gilbert of Southport, who is serving in Gov. Jim Hunt's administration, will be the guest speaker for a black history program for youth sponsored by the Little Prong Baptist Church Youth on Sunday, Feb. 7, at 3 p.m.

Gilbert's subject will be "The African American Report Card: Where Do We Go From Here." The speaker is a native of Stamps, Ark., and has served as a consultant to the National Forum for Black Public Administrators and as coordinator of General Relations and coordinator

of Minority Recruitment and Retention for his alma mater, Southern Arkansas University.

In addition to Gilbert, the program will feature music by area youth choirs and a special appearance by Arvella Marlow.

All area youth and their families are encouraged to attend, said spokesman Ercell Marlow Godwin.

Event Will Support Work Of Helping Hands Mission

Two area groups are banding together to present an inspirational dinner program and fund-raising event Saturday, Feb. 13, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Leland Middle School Cafeteria.

"A Year for Rebirth, Inspiration, Excellence and Survival" is the theme of the program sponsored by Helping Hands of Brunswick County and the Brunswick County Minority Cultural Awareness Coalition.

The keynote address will be presented by Dr. George Saunders of Boiling Spring Lakes. The dinner program will also feature Marva Robinson, a well-known soloist. According to a news release, the program will conclude with "a very special presentation."

Admission is by a tax-deductible contribution of \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 6 through 12 and for students. Children under 6 will be admitted free.

All profits from the event will be used by Helping Hands in its continuing mission of assisting the less fortunate of Brunswick County, said the Rev. Thurman B. Everett.

For additional ticket or program information contact either Everett, at 371-2196 or 253-4301, or Angelyn Moore, 754-8223, or a member of either sponsoring organization.

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