

Holly Fern, Japanese Holly Fern - *Cyrtomium falcatum*

The Holly Fern is a popular evergreen landscape plant because of its intense dark, green foliage. The rigid leaves are glossy and look like the leaves of holly (*Ilex* spp.). Its maximum height is about two feet and spreads only two to three feet, making it ideal for the shade border or shade containers.

It grows within shaded niches in rock gardens or tree shaded beds and prefers moist, well-drained soil. The leaves (fronds) will sunburn in full sun. Its dense fronds allow it to stand up to strong wind gusts without tattering. Above all, it is among the few ferns that survive well with salt air or saline water supply.

In true ferns, there are dark spots, or spores underneath the leaves (fronds). Ferns do not flower, but reproduce sexually from spores. Mature plants produce spores on the underside of the leaves. When these germinate they grow into small heart-shaped plants known as prothalli. Male and female cells are produced on these plants and after fertilization occurs the adult fern begins to develop.

As new growth appears in the spring, cut back old fronds, ferns will re-grow after spring cut-back, but do not cut into or injure the crown of the plant. Fertilize established ferns once or twice a year with a balanced fertilizer, diluted to half strength that is recommended on the label.

Good companion plants for holly fern include: hostas, impatiens and caladiums in the summer, or plant them amongst other types of ferns, such as southern wood fern, or lace fern. They make a great low border for shade beds as well.

Propagation:

Divide clumps during the warm season and plant divisions slightly deeper than the parent clump. Repot plants in early spring using a mixture of 1 part loam to 1 part peat moss to 1 part sharp sand; to each gallon of this mixture add 2 tablespoons of bone meal. Be careful not to set plants any deeper than at the depth at which they had been growing.

Interesting use: The fronds of the holly fern are commonly used as background greenery in flower arrangements because they are long lasting and the dark green contrasts well with colorful flowers.

