

TAUNTON'S

FOR YOUR REGION: Great woody plants

fine Gardening

A simple formula for designing a planting

UNCOMMON ANNUALS for the adventurous gardener

Ditch the beard: Grow these other irises instead

WHAT'S IN THE BAG? Find out what is in your potting soil



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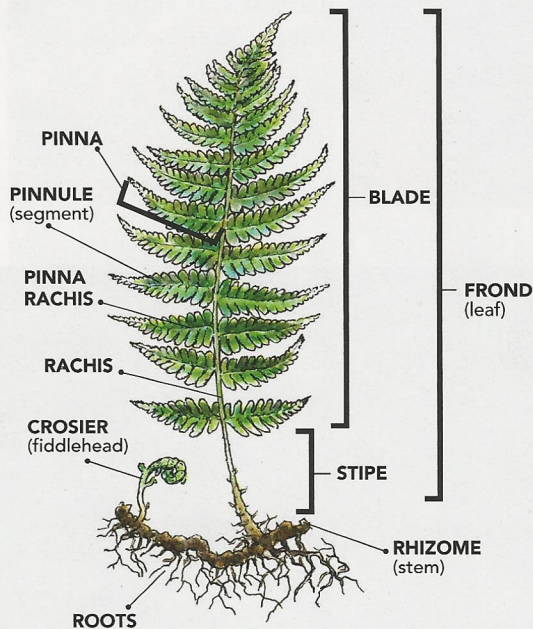
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TOP PERFORMERS

HOW TO SPEAK FERN



While common botanical terms can be used to describe the feathery foliage of ferns, there does exist an entire world of specialized fern terminology. Familiarity with these terms can help in deciphering catalog descriptions and will make you sound like an expert when garden visitors ask questions.



The young fronds of **'Pewter Lace' Japanese painted fern** (*A. niponicum* var. *picatum* 'Pewter Lace') are exquisite—dark burgundy accented with silvery green tips. 'Burgundy Lace' was a close color match in spring, and both cultivars matured to silver-green with a swath of purple down the middle of the fronds. While both were beautiful, 'Pewter Lace' was unaffected by drought stress and leaf scorch under the same conditions as 'Burgundy Lace'. The purple metallic color and lacy texture of 'Pewter Lace' mingles sublimely with black-purple-leaved coral bells (*Heuchera* spp. and cvs., Zones 4–9) such as 'Obsidian' or 'Black Pearl' and the larger leaves of brunnera (*Brunnera macrophylla* cvs., Zones 4–9) or rodgersia (*Rodgersia* spp. and cvs., Zones 4–9, pictured). Its habit—like that of all Japanese painted ferns—is a pleasingly haphazard arrangement of arched and twisted fronds that can reach 18 inches tall and 30 inches wide.

TOP PERFORMERS



'Victoriae' (*A. filix-femina* 'Victoriae'), a classic Victorian-era lady fern, features crisscrossing slender green pinnae that form distinctive X's along the rachis and nodding, fan-shaped tips. There's both a playfulness and a Victorian fussiness to the finely divided fronds. This cultivar's robust, vase-shaped habit with upright arching stems was a consistent favorite in the trial. Its affinity to 'Dre's Dagger'—purportedly a dwarf sport of 'Victoriae'—was indisputable, although the pinnae of 'Dre's Dagger' were narrower. Were it not for some winter crown damage, 'Dre's Dagger' would have gotten four stars, too.

'Encourage' (*A. filix-femina* 'Encourage'), one of the very best lady ferns in the trial, is a modern selection of the old-timey crested form 'Vernoniae Cristatum'. The light green fronds are tasseled at the tips, looking like a chorus line of frilly petticoats. Slow to develop the first summer, 'Encourage' had a robust vase-shaped habit by the second year and was particularly full and robust by the fourth year. The plants were in full sun by midafternoon, so some leaf scorching was observed occasionally in July and August.

