



L to r, Blue Star fern and Staghorn fern

Tips for Growing Tropical Hanging Basket Ferns

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Ferns are admirable plants for interior decoration. Epiphytic ferns, in particular, are adapted to a drier habitat than most terrestrial types, so are more suited to the centrally heated and air conditioned environment of a Houston home, and for much of the year will flourish in filtered light or shady sites outdoors.

Epiphytic ferns grow naturally in a totally soilless condition. These ferns grow without using the typical water and nutrient storage of soil. The plants obtain water and nutrients (leached from tree leaves or other collected debris) only during rain. Between periods of rain, the tree bark of the branch is dry. For these reasons:

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Epiphytic ferns should be grown in very well-drained media composed mainly of fir or redwood bark, osmunda fiber, Styrofoam beads, tree fern fiber, shredded pine bark, or sphagnum moss.

Thoroughly soak your epiphytic fern each time you water and allow it to remain dry 2-4 days before watering again.

Low concentrations (1/2-strength) of soluble fertilizer, organic or inorganic, can be added monthly (or use a slow-release, pelletized fertilizer).

Use room temperature or lukewarm water when watering. Avoid using softened water.

Fertilize only when the plants are actively putting on new growth, or if the foliage appears a paler green than normal. They can be damaged more easily than most houseplants if you over-fertilize.

Some people still mist their indoor ferns to increase humidity, but it is not very effective.

Misting also increases the likelihood of foliar leaf spot diseases. It's obviously not needed outside in Houston. You can try to over-winter your fern by cutting it back as needed in the fall and placing it in a light-filled area indoors.

Even a dormant fern likes moisture and a heated home can dry out a plant quickly.

Give your plant a good soaking in the shower a few times throughout the winter months.

If you choose to protect your outside ferns in place, drop them to the ground and cover with frost cloth as you would a tender shrub. Soil is much warmer than the surrounding air.



Great for hanging baskets: Bird's Nest fern, left, and two Rabbit's Foot ferns, center and right
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