



LOOKING FOR FERNS IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

BY PANAYOTI KELAIDIS

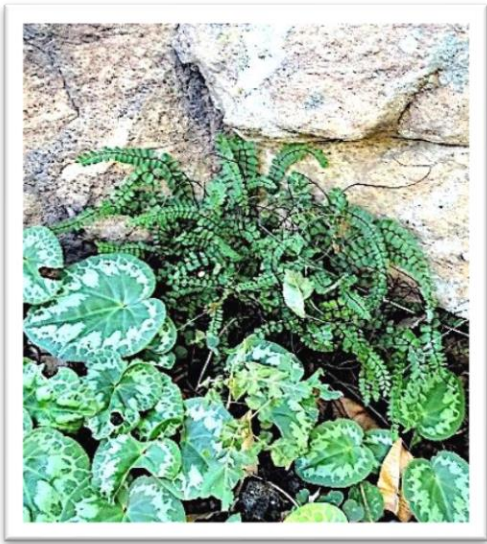
[Denver Botanic Gardens](#)

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If you want to see a fern in Colorado, good luck! Although we have nearly a hundred kinds of ferns and fern allies, most are tucked on inaccessible cliffs, or deep gorges. Unlike humid regions, where ferns can blanket the landscape, ferns in cold or dry regions are subtle, but they are present.

I have been astonished to find a vast assortment of ferns above treeline, well above 14,000 in the Himalaya, in the deserts of Central Asia and the American Southwest. I

have found them in the arctic and above tree line in New Zealand, the Andes and in the hot, dry corners of South Africa.



Asplenium trichomanes (above left with *Cyclamen purpurascens*) and above right in a garden. Below, *Cystopteris fragilis* near Denver, CO. (PANAYOTI KELAIDIS photos)

Some, like Braken (*Pteridium aquilinum*, *Asplenium trichomanes*, *Cystopteris fragilis*) are global—found on most continents and in many habitats. Others are highly specialized and local, like some of the dryland ferns of our Southwest such as *Bomeria hispida* that grows only in a corner of Texas and Mexico.

I am especially intrigued by the strange distribution of a few ferns, like the Interrupted fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*) which I've always associated with the hardwood forests of eastern North America. But I found this growing abundantly in forests of Yunnan, in the Chinese Himalaya!

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Osmunda claytoniana Tianchi Lake, left, and ferns planted on walls along streets in Chengdu China (PANAYOTI KELAIDIS photos)

Ferns seem to love to grow in scenic spots and in special places, from temples in Tibet to even in crevices of the Acropolis! At Denver Botanic Gardens we have tried to promote a regional garden style that reflects our Western landscape more faithfully.

A surprising number of Texas natives, like Undaunted Muhly Grass (*Muhlenbergia reverchonii*), Silver (*Vernonia larseni*) and Texas Oak (*Quercus buckleyi*) have emerged as stars in Rocky Mountain landscapes. The extraordinary biodiversity of Texas is a resource that benefits all of America.