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BEST FERNS FOR THE NORTH AND NORTHWEST.

G. W. CARVER.

Owing to the great beauty and usefulness of the ferns in decorative lines, and the difficulties with which they are grown in the North and Northwest, numerous inquiries have come to us from time to time as to the best varieties. This led us to make some experiments in this direction.

A large number of ferns have been subjected to very rigid tests for several years, and the results have indeed been gratifying, as we have proven beyond doubt that many of the most beautiful ones will thrive and soon make handsome specimens with a little care.

Those having a fernery, or green-house, where light, heat, moisture, etc., may be controlled, need give little attention to varieties, as any of the cultivated sorts will do as well here as elsewhere; but those having only ordinary windows and conservatories must discard many from the list. As a result of the test we wish to recommend the following varieties:

Among the Adiantums, or maiden hair ferns, we have A. Cuneatum, a strong grower, fine for cutting, and an ideal plant.

A. excisum is an excellent and vigorous grower.

A. Farleyense is a grand plant and should be in every collection. But must be given an upper shelf, as it requires more heat than the others; and under no circumstances must this variety be allowed to suffer for water.

A. gracillimum is considered the most beautiful and useful of its class; has very large, spreading fronds, with finely divided segments, making it unusually airy and attractive.

The following Pteris are desirable:

P. tremula. No collection is complete without this magnificent plant. It is a rapid grower, fine in foliage, and accommodates itself to almost any surroundings.

P. argyraea and P. Cretica albo lineata are both good and easily grown.
P. Victoria. This is, without doubt, the grandest fern in cultivation. The fronds are neatly divided, very variable, curling gracefully at the ends; a broad silver band runs down the center of each division of the fronds. Unfortunately, it is rather tender and must have some petting in the way of heat and moisture; but a well grown plant is doubly worth all the extra care bestowed upon it.

Onychium Japonicum is quite distinct in growth and appearance, and especially useful in table decoration.

The Nephrolepis or sword ferns are all robust growers, easy to manage, fine for jardinieres, center-pieces, hanging-baskets, and in fact any place where a bold, striking effect is desired.

The following are the most desirable, N. exalta, N. tuberosa, N. davallioides var. furcans.

Cheilanthes tomentosa deserves special mention. I am frank to say that I know of but few ferns that possess so many good qualities. It accommodates itself to almost any circumstances, is easy of growth, and as sure of good results as a geranium; its dull gray color being the only thing against it. Prof. L. H. Pammel gives an excellent description of it in the *Orange Judd Farmer*, Oct. 6, 1894, p. 154.

The selaginellas are useful in all kinds of decoration, and require the same general treatment as the ferns; we take pleasure in recommending the following: S. umbrosia, S. caulescens, S. Martensii variegata.

There are many others in each section that are doubtless of much merit, as they come highly recommended, but as yet we have not tested them.

As to pots, cases, ferneries, etc., nothing need be said, as fancy will dictate what should be used.

With reference to soil, there are many mixtures, but we have found the following to be the best for general purposes: Where leaf-mould is obtainable, two parts should be used and one of sand and peat; where neither leaf-mould nor peat can be had, finely cut cocoanut refuse, or packers' moss (Sphagnum), mixed in the same proportion with the soil, will answer just as well. A few pebbles, pot fragments, etc., must be
used for drainage. A thin layer of moss should be put over this, so that the drain passages may not be stopped up at the first watering, as is invariably the case if this precaution is neglected.

All the plants we have referred to will grow fairly well in a north window, but will give much better satisfaction if given a south or east exposure with subdued sunlight.

PROPAGATION.

There are three principal ways of propagating ferns:
1. By dividing the larger plants.
2. By buds.
3. By growing from spores.

In dividing plants, an occasional tuft of fronds, some little distance from the parent plant, indicates that an under-ground stem has thrown up a separate plant, which may be easily removed by inserting a sharp knife between the two, cutting the underground stem; this can be done without any damage to either. The young plant should be given a pot just large enough to accommodate its roots comfortably, put in a sheltered place and watered carefully for a few days.

The method of growing from buds is very easy. Take any plant upon which the little buds have made an appearance, fasten down with a hair-pin, wire, or something similar, the frond containing these little plants, upon nice, moist, sandy, soil; sift a little loose earth over the plants and cover the pot with a pane of glass. Allow them to develop two or three fronds; they can then be separated and treated the same as recommended for division.

Ferns are very easily grown from spores. There is a variety of ways in which to grow them, but the following is our favorite method outside of a green-house. Take as many soft brick as desired; allow them to take up all the water they will; place them in a basin with just enough water to keep them wet; dust the spores over them; place in a warm, damp place—the dampness may be secured by placing the basin in a box with a few inches of wet sand in the bottom, and covering the whole with a pane of glass, leaving only enough space for good ventilation.
Water must be poured into the basin when needed, as any upon the brick will wash the spores away. The young ferns are allowed to grow on these bricks until two or three well defined fronds make their appearance, when they may be removed, potted and treated the same as given above for newly potted plants.

Ferns require repotting from time to time, the same as other plants. This can be ascertained by turning the pot upside down and tapping the rim upon some hard substance, a few taps being sufficient to remove the ball of earth. If the pot is filled with roots, gently remove about one-third of the earth at the bottom, and an equal amount from the top; supply with good, fresh soil; water well, and shade for a few days. An occasional application of liquid manure will be of benefit to plants long in pots, or to strong growing varieties.
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