Spreading Wood Fern

Dryopteris expansa

Height: 30 inches

Spread: 4 feet

Sunlight: ◐ ●

Hardiness Zone: 2

Other Names: Alpine Buckler Fern, Spiny Wood Fern



Spreading Wood Fern foliage
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder



Spreading Wood Fern
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Description:

A semi-evergreen fern with a spreading, arching form; noted for having a woody, ascending base, covered with brown scales; broad, triangular sea-green fronds form a symmetrical rosette; keep evenly moist; an excellent groundcover for shady, wooded areas

Ornamental Features

Spreading Wood Fern is primarily valued in the garden for its interesting and distinctive form. Its attractive spiny ferny bipinnately compound leaves remain bluish-green in color throughout the year.

Landscape Attributes

Spreading Wood Fern is a dense herbaceous evergreen fern with an indistinguished habit of growth. It brings an extremely fine and delicate texture to the garden composition and should be used to full effect.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, and should be cut back in late fall in preparation for winter. Deer don't particularly care for this plant and will usually leave it alone in favor of tastier treats. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Spreading Wood Fern is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Mass Planting
- Border Edging
- General Garden Use
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens

Planting & Growing

Spreading Wood Fern will grow to be about 30 inches tall at maturity, with a spread of 4 feet. Its foliage tends to remain dense right to the ground, not requiring facer plants in front. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 15 years. As an evegreen perennial, this plant will typically keep its form and foliage year-round. As this plant tends to go dormant in summer, it is best interplanted with late-season bloomers to hide the dying foliage.

This plant does best in a location that gets morning sunlight but is shaded from the hot afternoon sun, although it will also grow in full shade. Keep it away from hot, dry locations that receive direct afternoon sun or which get reflected sunlight, such as against the south side of a white wall. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. It is particular about its soil conditions, with a strong preference for rich, acidic soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution, and will benefit from being planted in a relatively sheltered location. Consider applying a thick mulch around the root zone over the growing season to conserve soil moisture. This species is not originally from North America, and parts of it are known to be toxic to humans and animals, so care should be exercised in planting it around children and pets. It can be propagated by division.