Common Oak Fern

Gymnocarpium dryopteris



Common Oak Fern foliage
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 15 inches

Spread: 20 inches

Sunlight: ◐ ●

Hardiness Zone: 2

Other Names: Northern Oak Fern

Description:

A common, native fern with a mounded, arching habit; fiddleheads emerge in spring on slender, hairless, purplish brown stems, each bearing 3 fronds; keep evenly moist; an excellent choice for shaded gardens, or well drained wooded areas

Ornamental Features

Common Oak Fern is primarily valued in the garden for its cascading habit of growth. Its attractive ferny bipinnately compound leaves emerge chartreuse in spring, turning bluish-green in color throughout the season. The burgundy stems can be quite attractive.

Landscape Attributes

Common Oak Fern is a dense herbaceous fern with a shapely form and gracefully arching fronds. 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.

Common Oak Fern is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Mass Planting
- Rock/Alpine Gardens
- Border Edging
- General Garden Use
- Groundcover
- Naturalizing And Woodland Gardens

Planting & Growing

Common Oak Fern will grow to be about 15 inches tall at maturity, with a spread of 20 inches. Its foliage tends to remain dense right to the ground, not requiring facer plants in front. It grows at a slow rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for 50 years or more. As an herbaceous perennial, this plant will usually die back to the crown each winter, and will regrow from the base each spring. Be careful not to disturb the crown in late winter when it may not be readily seen! 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 partial shade to full shade. Keep it well 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 does best in average to evenly moist conditions, but will not tolerate standing water. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in sandy 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 native to parts of 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.