

Christmas Fern

Polystichum acrostichoides

North American Native



Polystichum (po-lis-ti-kum)
From the Greek *polys*, many and *stichos*, row. The sori are in many rows.

acrostichoides (a-kro-sti-koi-deez) meaning resembling the *Acrostichum* fern, a tropical genus, where the sori completely cover the undersurface.



About the Species:



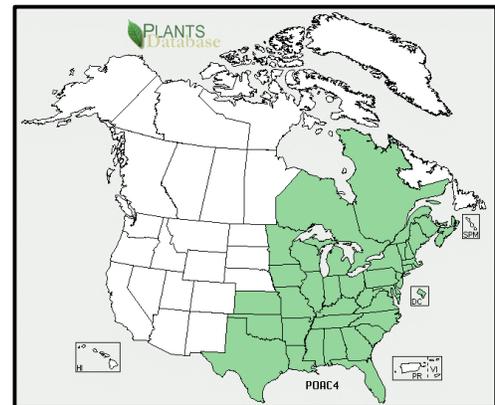
Family: Polypodiaceae

Zones: 3 - 9 **Height:** 2' **Spacing:** 18"

This hardy evergreen fern is similar in looks to the indoor Boston Fern Santa's boots. Some sources suggest that the common name comes from the fact that this fern is still green at Christmas time. The 2 foot tall fronds are dark green, shiny, and evergreen, creating winter interest. A characteristic of the genus *Polystichum* is the bent-over-backwards tassel-like form of the unfurling fronds. This rhizomatous fern will increase its fountain-like asymmetric clumps but will not spread. During the winter, Christmas Fern stands out against the brown leaves on the forest floor.

Habitat: Christmas Fern grows well in rocky soil in shade, but will tolerate some sun if it stays moist. Extremely drought tolerant, this fern will do well in dry shade. It prefers sandy and loamy moist soils in full to semi-shade in a variety of pH levels. Christmas Fern can be found growing natively on forest shady floors, and rocky slopes. It is also found growing on banks of streams, through out the woods, and along trails in the woods.

In the Garden: Use this popular fern in woodland gardens, shade gardens, on the edges of shady areas, in deep shade, as cut greens in arrangements, and in containers. Old fronds should be removed in the spring to improve the appearance of the plant and to remove potential areas that may harbor fungal diseases.



USDA Plants Database

Other Uses: Native Americans used this fern to treat a variety of complaints. A tea from the roots was used as a blood purifier, emetic, and febrifuge and in the treatment of chills, fevers, pneumonia, stomach or bowel complaints and rheumatism. The root was also used as a poultice or decoction in the treatment of rheumatism. The Cherokee used the fiddleheads for food.