Acrostichum daneifolium Leather Fern

Edward F. Gilman

Introduction
This beautiful fern (Figure 1) that is native to Florida grows larger than many other ferns, becoming 4 to 8 feet tall. The 3- to 6-foot-long, pinnately divided fronds emerge from the ground to form a beautifully textured, open form. The plant changes very little throughout the year, but provides a continual green mass of beautiful foliage.

General Information
Scientific name: Acrostichum daneifolium
Pronunciation: ack-ro-STISH-um dan-ee-if-FOLE-ee-um
Common name(s): leather fern
Family: Adiantaceae
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Figure 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: mass planting; accent; border
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Figure 1. Leather fern.

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description
Height: 4 to 8 feet
Spread: 3 to 5 feet
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: open
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: coarse


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Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: undulate
Leaf shape: linear; oblong
Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: no flowers
Flower characteristic: no flowers

Fruit
Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: unknown
Fruit cover: unknown
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; usually with one stem/trunk
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture
Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: little
Soil salt tolerance: good
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other
Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management
Leather fern looks spectacular planted in mass in a large landscape. Its unusual texture and open habit combine to make this a great, eye-catching attraction. In a smaller residential landscape, leather fern can be used as a specimen planted alone to add texture to the garden. Many ferns grow poorly near the coast, however this one is tolerant of all but the most exposed ocean-front lots.

Provide a shaded or partially shaded spot for leather fern for the best growth and to keep plants healthy. Prolonged direct sun, especially in the summer, can burn foliage. Many ferns grow best with regular applications of fertilizer to maintain growth and green foliage. Ferns transplant well any time of year as long the soil ball is handled carefully.

Pests and Diseases
This plant is relatively pest free.