Adiantum spp. Maidenhair Fern

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Introduction

This extremely fine-textured, delicate, airy fern is a graceful addition to shady, moist outdoor landscapes or bright, indirect light locations indoors. Its light grey-green, soft foliage adds a quieting feeling to any landscape, particularly around a water feature in the garden. It is best planted in mass on two- to three-foot centers, but can be used as an edging or specimen in a small garden area. A North American native, maidenhair fern also makes an excellent groundcover, spreading easily on creeping stems.

General Information

Scientific name: Adiantum spp.

Pronunciation: ad-ee-AN-tum species

Common name(s): maidenhair fern

Family: Pteridaceae

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

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; ground cover; edging

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet

Spread: 2 to 3 feet

Plant habit: weeping; round

Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: slow
Texture: fine

**Foliage**
Leaf arrangement: most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: orbiculate; ovate
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 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: no fruit
Fruit length: no fruit
Fruit cover: no fruit
Fruit color: no fruit
Fruit characteristic: no fruit

**Trunk and Branches**
Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

**Culture**
Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: Poor
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

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

**Use and Management**

Neeing above-average humidity, maidenhair fern grows in partial to full shade on well-drained soils with high organic matter but does not tolerate dry soil. The southern maidenhair and brittle maidenhair grow best in alkaline soils while others grow best in acid soils. It will cascade over the side of a container in a shady garden spot.

Some of the available species include: *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, southern maidenhair, 1.5 feet tall; *A. hispidulum*, rosy maidenhair, one-foot-tall, young fronds rosy brown; *A. pedatum*, western maidenhair, 1 to 2.5 feet tall, most popular one grown; and *A. peruvianum*, silver dollar maidenhair, 1.5 feet or more tall, leaf segments quite large, up to 2 inches wide.

Propagation is by division or spores.

**Design Considerations**
The small size, tiny leaves, and delicate form of the Maidenhair fern make it perfect for containers and small scale, special spaces in the landscape. Companion plants should have larger, smooth leaves to contrast with the tiny multiple leaves of the fern. Simple forms and dark green or smooth foliage of companion plants will highlight the delicate foliage. The medium green of the fern leaves will work well with different flower colors, but deep or bright colors will show better than light pastels. Simple small or medium size flowers will contrast more with the tiny foliage without adding too much detail.

**Pests and Diseases**
Problems include scale, mites, mealy bugs, snails, and slugs, but are usually not serious.

Maidenhair fern is susceptible to root rot in soil that is kept too wet.