

Adiantum spp. Maidenhair Fern¹

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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.



Figure 1. Full form—*Adiantum* spp.: maidenhair fern.
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

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



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet

Spread: 2 to 3 feet

Plant habit: weeping; round

Plant density: moderate

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant; and Gail Hansen, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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:

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

Needing 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.

