

Asplenium nidus Bird's Nest Fern¹

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Introduction

Eventually reaching about four feet tall and wide, Bird's nest fern is a striking plant to use as a specimen planting, at entranceways, or in containers where it will always attract attention (Fig. 1). The large, stemless, apple green leaves have a black, prominent midrib and unfurl from a tight center, giving a bird nest effect. The spores are borne in prominent brown sporophores on the underside of leaves.



Figure 1. Bird's nest fern

General Information

Scientific name: *Asplenium nidus*

Pronunciation: ass-PLÉE-nee-um NYE-dus

Common name(s): bird's nest fern

Family: Polypodiaceae

Plant type: herbaceous; perennial

USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: mass planting; foundation; border; ground cover; edging; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright; round

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

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Foliage

Leaf arrangement: most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: lobed; undulate

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: more than 36 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

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Growing in rich, moist soil, bird's nest fern prefers shady locations. Leaves turn yellow and the plant stops growing in the sun. Like many ferns, drought tolerance is minimal. It can also be copper-wired to tree trunks to grow on a fibrous

slab. Plant on two to three-foot centers to create a mass planting.

There is a dwarf cultivar which grows to about two feet tall and wide. It is reportedly cold hardy into the lower part of USDA hardiness zone 8b.

Propagation is by spores or from tissue culture.

Pest and Diseases

Problems include foliar nematodes, scale, slugs, and snails.

No diseases are of major concern.