

# *Dryopteris erythrosora* Autumn Fern, Japanese Shield Fern, Japanese Wood Fern<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This finely divided, dark green fern has a delicate appearance but is actually a very hardy survivor. Its slowly spreading habit and ability to tolerate neglect make it an ideal candidate for use as a groundcover. This underutilized plant is one of the few ferns to have seasonal color value; the fronds appearing reddish when young. It combines well with *Mahonia fortuneii* and holly fern for a mixed planting in a shady location. It will grow to about 18 inches tall with single plants spreading no more than 24 inches.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Dryopteris erythrosora*: Autumn Fern, Japanese Shield Fern, Japanese Wood Fern  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf - *Dryopteris erythrosora*: Autumn Fern, Japanese Shield Fern, Japanese Wood Fern  
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## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Dryopteris erythrosora*

**Pronunciation:** dry-OP-teer-iss air-rith-ro-e-SOR-uh

**Common name(s):** autumn fern, Japanese shield fern, Japanese wood fern

**Family:** *Aspleniaceae*

**Plant type:** herbaceous; perennial

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 11 (Figure 3)

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**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** mass planting; edging

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



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 1 to 2 feet

**Spread:** 1 to 2 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

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

**Leaf type:** bipinnately compound

**Leaf margin:** lobed

**Leaf shape:** oblong

**Leaf venation:** pinnate; none, or difficult to see

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** purple or red

**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:** brown

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

## 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:** clay; sand; acidic; loam

**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:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

## Use and Management

Requiring shady conditions, autumn fern grows in any good forest loam and has good drought tolerance. It can withstand an hour or two of direct sun. California ratings state autumn fern is accepting of temperatures ranging from 109°F down to 3°F. Its slow growth habit makes the plant expensive to purchase but it is well worth it. This is truly a no-maintenance plant. Plant on 12 to 18 inch centers to establish a solid ground cover. Fronds can be cut and used in vases for indoor greenery but will last only three or four days.

Propagation is by division or by spores.

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.