Adiantum spp.¹
Edward F. Gilman²

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 by creeping stems.

General Information

Scientific name: Adiantum spp.
Pronunciation: ad-ee-AN-tum species
Common name(s): Maidenhair Fern
Family: Adiantaceae
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 1)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
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

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-13, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1999. Please visit the EDIS web site at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.
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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 two inches wide.

Propagation is by division or spores.

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

Pests and Diseases

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
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests
Maidenhair Fern is susceptible to root rots in soil which is kept too wet.