

Acrostichum danaeifolium: Leather Fern, Giant Leather Fern¹

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<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

This document is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman.

Introduction

Leather fern is an herbaceous perennial plant, native to Florida, with a height of 4 to 8 feet (Figure 1). The 3- to 6-foot-long pinnately divided fronds emerge from the ground to form a beautifully textured, open form (Figure 2). The plant changes very little throughout the year but provides an evergreen mass of attractive foliage. The underside of the fertile fronds are brown due to the presence of reproductive spores, which bring added color into the landscape (Figure 3). Leather ferns are well suited for mass plantings, accents, or borders. Leather fern is a good option for shaded, wet areas in the landscape.



Figure 2. Leaf—*Acrostichum danaeifolium*: leather fern frond.

Credit: © Darren Embro, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND)



Figure 1. Full form—*Acrostichum danaeifolium*: leather fern mass planting.

Credit: Ryan Fessenden



Figure 3. Leaf—*Acrostichum danaeifolium*: leather fern frond underside.

Credit: Ryan Fessenden

General Information

Scientific name: *Acrostichum danaeifolium*

Pronunciation: ack-ro-STISH-um dan-ee-if-FOLE-ee-um

Common name(s): leather fern; giant leather fern

Family: *Pteridaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11B (Figures 4 and 5)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

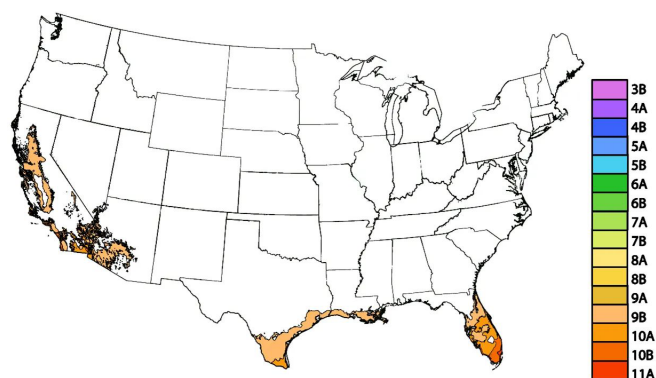


Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map. Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

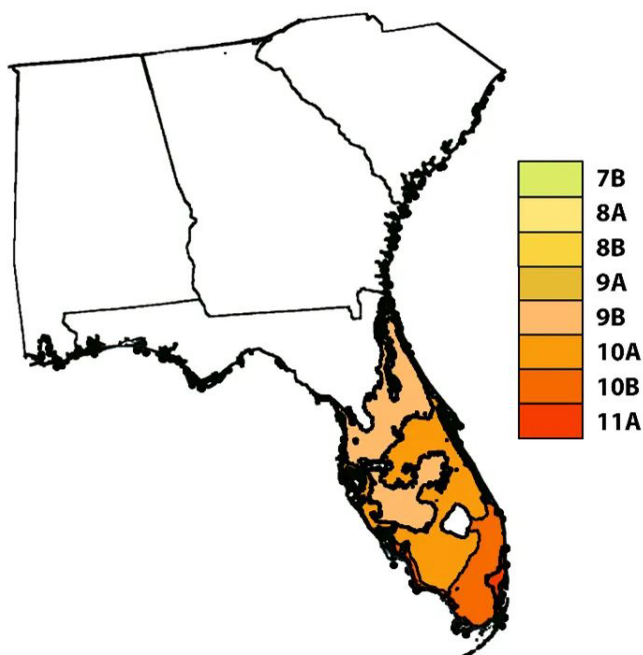


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map.

Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: mass planting; accent; border

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

Description

Height: 6 to 12 feet

Spread: 5 to 10 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: linear; oblong

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 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: not applicable

Fruit length: not applicable

Fruit cover: not applicable

Fruit color: not applicable

Fruit characteristic: not applicable

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; usually with one stem/trunk

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade; plant grows in partial shade; plant grows in the sun (when located near water)

Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay

Drought tolerance: low

Soil salt tolerance: high

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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

Use and Management

Leather ferns should be planted in full to partial shade for optimal growth and plant health. This plant may be located in full sun but thrives best in these conditions when planted near a water body. Locate this plant in moist soil, as it exhibits low drought tolerance. Prolonged direct sun, especially in the summer, can burn the foliage edges.

Leather ferns look spectacular when utilized in mass plantings as the plant's unusual texture and open habit bring added interest to the landscape. In a smaller residential landscape, leather fern can be used as a specimen planted alone to add texture to the garden. Furthermore, its high salt tolerance makes it an excellent choice for coastal gardens, provided it is protected from direct salt spray.

Design Considerations

With its large, medium-green fronds and lush, irregular form, the giant leather fern gives a cool, tropical feel to the landscape. The fronds' distinctive brown undersides add a surprising layer of color and texture, making this fern highly effective in mass plantings, as a bold accent, or to define a border. For compelling pairings, contrast its deep green foliage with fine-textured plants, such as those with small leaves. Complement its color with flowers in warm shades of soft yellow, light coral, and pink, or use crisp white blooms for a striking effect.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

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