

# Asparagus aethiopicus 'Sprengeri': Sprenger Asparagus Fern<sup>1</sup>

Keighly Graves, Wendy Wilber, Tom Wichman, Claire Lewis, Gail Hansen, and Ryan Klein<sup>2</sup>

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

## IFAS Assessment

North

### Caution

Caution - manage to prevent escape. May be recommended by IFAS. Will be reassessed in two years.

[view assessment](#)

## IFAS Assessment

Central, South

### Invasive

Invasive and not recommended by IFAS. Will be reassessed every 10 years. Specified and limited uses may be considered by the IFAS Invasive Plants Working Group

[view assessment](#)

*This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a document series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit <https://FloridaFriendlyLandscaping.com> to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.*

## Introduction

Sprenger asparagus fern is a rounded herbaceous perennial with a spreading growth habit, a height of 2 feet, and spread of 4 feet (Figure 1). It is used in the landscape for its attractive, fine-textured foliage. It is an important distinction that this plant is not a true fern; the fine-textured, fern-like foliage is what gives this plant the common name of asparagus fern. The structures that most refer to as leaves are actually leaf-like branchlets called cladophylls (Figure 2). These tiny cladophylls are linear, flattened structures that are bright green in color. They occur singly or in groups of 3 or more at a node. The stems of this plant emerge directly from the ground and become woody and spiny. Caution is recommended when handling this species as the thorns may cause

significant irritation. This plant produces inconspicuous white fragrant flowers that occur in axillary racemes (Figure 3). Showy red berries follow the flowers, appear throughout the year, and attract birds (Figure 4).

The seeds of this plant may germinate and escape the cultivated area into surrounding natural areas and should be managed with caution to prevent escape. See the IFAS Assessment for further information (<https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/asparagus-aethiopicus/>). This plant is well suited for use in a mass planting or groundcover, in a container or above-ground planter, as a border, cascading down a wall, used in hanging baskets, or may be grown indoors.



Figure 1. Full form—*Asparagus aethiopicus* 'Sprengeri': Sprenger asparagus fern.  
Credit: DimaBerlin via Adobe Stock



Figure 4. Fruit—*Asparagus aethiopicus* 'Sprengeri': Sprenger asparagus fern.  
Credit: Jana via Adobe Stock



Figure 2. Leaf—*Asparagus aethiopicus* 'Sprengeri': Sprenger asparagus fern cladophylls.  
Credit: backiris via Adobe Stock



Figure 3. Flower—*Asparagus aethiopicus* 'Sprengeri': Sprenger asparagus fern.  
Credit: skymoon13 via Adobe Stock

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Asparagus aethiopicus* 'Sprengeri'

**Previous name(s):** *Asparagus densiflorus* 'Sprengeri' (misapplied)

**Pronunciation:** ass-SPAR-uh-gus A-thee-o-pie-cus

**Common name(s):** Sprenger asparagus fern, asparagus fern

**Family:** *Asparagaceae*

**Plant type:** herbaceous; perennial

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9A through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9A-11A

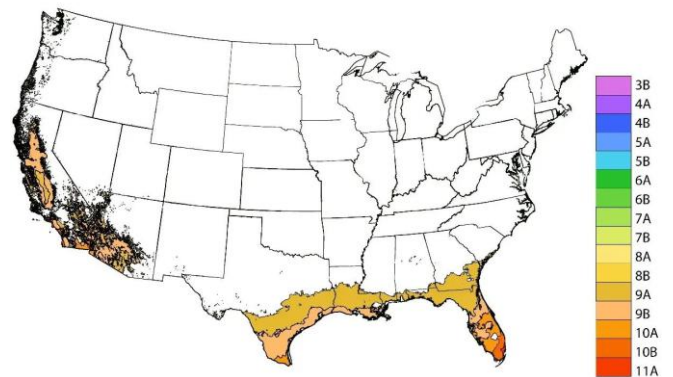


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

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 9A-11A

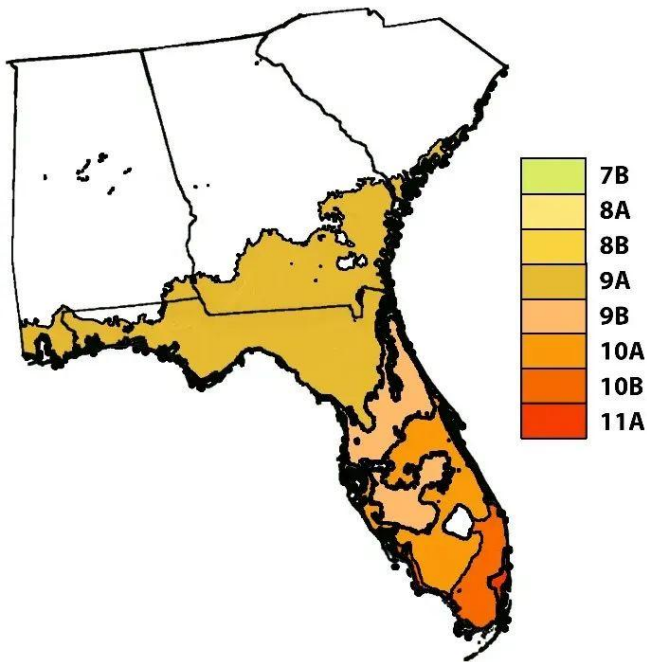


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

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:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** Caution in all zones, according to the IFAS Assessment:

<https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/asparagus-aethiopicus/>

**Uses:** mass planting; container or above-ground planter; groundcover; border; cascading down a wall; hanging basket; suitable for growing indoors

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

### Description

**Height:** 1 to 2 feet

**Spread:** 3 to 4 feet

**Plant habit:** spreading; round; arching

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** fine

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** linear

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

**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:** white

**Flower characteristic:** flowers periodically throughout the year; inconspicuous; fragrant

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval

**Fruit length:** less than 1/2 inch

**Fruit cover:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** red

**Fruit characteristic:** showy; attracts birds

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

### Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in partial shade; plant grows in the shade

**Soil tolerances:** occasionally wet; slightly alkaline; acidic; clay; sand; loam

**Drought tolerance:** moderate to high

**Soil salt tolerances:** good

**Plant spacing:** 18 to 24 inches

### Other

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** evergreen foliage

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

**Toxicity:** plant exhibits low toxic characteristics; all parts of the plant contain an unknown toxic component; ingestion may cause gastrointestinal issues; sap may cause contact dermatitis

### Use and Management

Sprenger asparagus fern is adaptable to various well-drained soils and will thrive in partial to full shade. The foliage of asparagus fern is killed by frost in the northern range of its planting zone, but the plant will recover in USDA hardiness zones 6A to 11B. It is very drought

tolerant and will survive in hot, dry locations, although it will grow slower in dry locations. This plant also exhibits salt tolerance and may be used in coastal landscaping. This plant should not be located in direct sunlight, as it will cause leaf scorching. Wet soil should be avoided as it can cause root rot.

This plant is well-suited as a border plant or groundcover. It can be maintained by pruning to less than two feet in height. It may also be planted in containers or above-ground planters, hanging baskets, or trained to cascade over a wall. This plant may also be utilized in mixed shrub groupings.

The berries contain 1 or 2 black, hard seeds that can be used for propagation; the seeds germinate in 4 to 6 weeks. This plant may also be propagated by cuttings and division of the root ball.

## Design Considerations

Sprenger asparagus fern has a clumping, arching form that resembles mounds when grown in clusters. The arching branches cascade nicely over container edges or garden walls. Use caution in planters around patios as the thorns can cause irritation. Companion plants should have large, smooth leaves to contrast with the tiny needle-like branches of the fern. Simple forms and dark green or smooth foliage of companion plants will highlight the delicate foliage. The light to medium green of the plant 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, and white, yellow, and blue flowers will complement the bright red berries.

## Pest and Diseases

Pest issues include mites. No diseases of major concern.

<sup>1</sup> This document is FPS051, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised August 2018, June 2022, and December 2025. Visit the Ask IFAS website at <https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/> for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit [fl.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://fl.ifas.ufl.edu/).*

<sup>2</sup> Keighly Graves, horticultural science specialist, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program; Wendy Wilber, state program coordinator and Extension agent IV, UF/IFAS Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program; Tom Wichman, Extension program manager, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Claire Lewis, state specialized agent II and director Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design, Department of Horticultural Sciences; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information, and other services only to individuals and institutions that operate in compliance with applicable federal and state non-discrimination laws and policies. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, Dean for UF/IFAS Extension.