

Asplenium nidus: Bird's Nest Fern¹

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

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

Bird's nest fern is a member of the Spleenwort family (*Aspleniaceae*), which has over 700 species with worldwide distribution. There are about 30 species that are native to North America, with several being found naturally in Florida. Bird's nest fern (*Asplenium nidus*) is native to the humid, tropical rainforests of Oceania (Australia and surrounding island countries) where the plant grows epiphytically (Figure 1). This plant is an herbaceous perennial with a rounded, upright growth habit that reaches a height and spread of 4 feet. The large, stemless, bright-green leaves have a black, prominent midrib and unfurl from a tight center, giving a bird's nest effect (Figure 2). The nest-like shape of this plant allows it to trap organic matter, which breaks down and fertilizes the plant naturally. The spores are borne in prominent brown sporophores on the underside of leaves. This is a striking plant to use as a specimen planting at entranceways, or in containers where it will always attract attention in the landscape. This plant is also well suited for mass plantings or groundcovers, foundation, border or edging, grown epiphytically, or is suitable for growing indoors in bright indirect light (Figure 3).



Figure 1. Epiphytic form—*Asplenium nidus*: Bird's nest fern.

Credit: devilkae via Adobe Stock



Figure 2. Leaf—*Asplenium nidus*: Bird's nest fern.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Full form—*Asplenium nidus*: Bird's nest fern planted as a groundcover.
Credit: Arunee via Adobe Stock

General Information

Scientific name: *Asplenium nidus*

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

Common name(s): bird's nest fern

Family: *Aspleniaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous; perennial

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

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

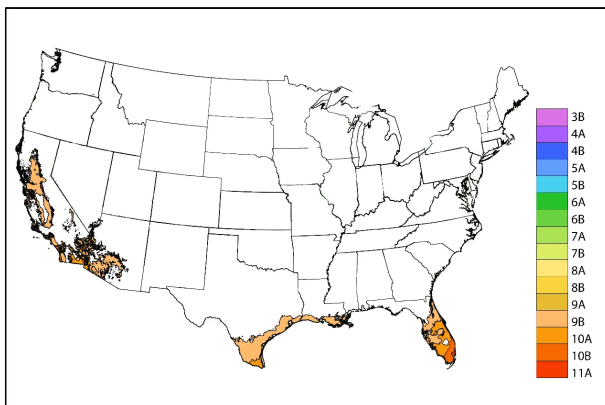


Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

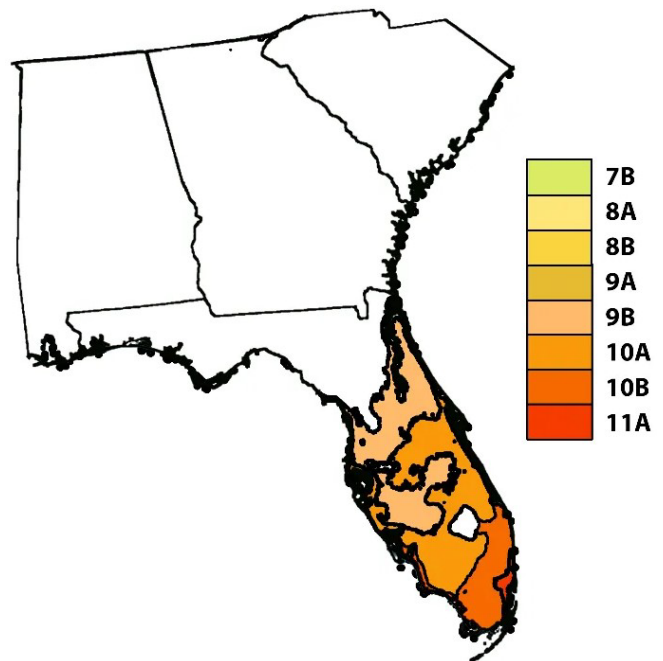


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

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

Uses: mass planting; foundation; border; groundcover; edging; suitable for growing indoors; grown epiphytically; specimen

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

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright; round

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

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: 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 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; acidic; loam; high organic matter

Drought tolerance: poor

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: evergreen foliage

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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

Use and Management

Bird's nest fern thrives in shaded, moist conditions, and should be planted in soil with high organic matter. Like many ferns, drought tolerance is minimal. As this plant is epiphytic, it can also be wired to tree trunks or grown on a fibrous slab. Plant on two- to three-foot centers to create a mass planting or groundcover effect. Bird's nest fern works well in the landscape as a specimen plant or in mixed landscape beds as an edging plant. This plant may also be used in a container, hanging basket, above ground planter, or is well suited as a houseplant. Locate bird's nest fern in bright, indirect light indoors. Cultivars of this plant are available, with varying leaf structure and growth sizes. *Asplenium antiquum* is another species of bird's nest fern (native to Asia), which is common in the trade. This species is smaller and more commonly sold as a houseplant.

Propagation is by spores or from tissue culture.

Design Considerations

Bird's nest ferns add a lush, tropical look to shaded landscapes, especially beneath tree canopies. Their upright rosettes of broad, bright green fronds are ideal for containers and small, special spaces. For compelling contrast, pair them with the different textures of variegated shell ginger, bromeliads, and other ferns. Low-spreading groundcovers like sunshine mimosa or perennial peanut can also work well in adjacent, sunnier spots. The fern's light green fronds serve as a versatile backdrop for flowers; while many colors work, deep and vivid hues create the most dramatic effect. Simple, smaller blooms in white, yellow, or blue also offer a crisp, clean contrast.

Pest and Diseases

Pest issues include foliar nematodes, scale, slugs, and snails. No diseases of major concern.

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