

VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

Ferns

And

Fern Culture

THEIR NATIVE HABITATS, ORGANISATION, HABITS OF GROWTH, COMPOST FOR DIFFERENT GENERA;
CULTIVATION IN POTS, BASKETS, ROCKWORK, WALLS;

IN
STOVE, GREENHOUSE, DWELLING-HOUSE, AND OUTDOOR FERNERIES; POTTING, WATERING,
PROPAGATION, ETC.

SELECTIONS OF FERNS

SUITABLE FOR STOVE, WARM, COOL, AND COLD GREENHOUSES; FOR BASKETS, WALLS, EXHIBITION,
WARDIAN CASES, DWELLING-HOUSES, AND OUTDOOR FERNERIES.

INSECT PESTS AND THEIR ERADICATION, &c.

By

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TRICHOMANES RENIFORME.
(The New Zealand Kidney Fern.)



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PUBLISHERS' FOREWORD

This *Vintage Words of Wisdom* title was published in 1892 at the height of the fern craze that swept Victorian society. It provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of fern culture that remains relevant today and, we think, will inspire the modern reader to consider or reconsider these wonderful plants for their garden, terrace, or greenhouse.

The word *pteridomania*, used to describe the fashion for ferns and their culture, was attributed to Charles Kingsley in the 1850s. It encapsulates the enthusiasm for these plants, which went beyond the garden and fernery to have an influence upon art, design and ornamental detail in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some suggested even more, that the interest in ferns was symptomatic of cultural improvement. Abraham Stansfield, a nurseryman and amateur botanist writing in 1858, says:

The bright colours of flowers are admired by the least intellectual but the beauty of form and texture of ferns requires a higher degree of mental perception and a more cultivated intellect for its proper appreciation. Hence we regard the growing taste for the cultivation of ferns as proof of mental advancement.

The vogue for ferns was encouraged by the development of the railways that permitted town-dwellers to travel into the countryside to seek out the best specimens and return them to their gardens, rockeries, ferneries and Wardian cases. This resulted in the destruction of many natural habitats as woods, valleys and glens were plundered for their ferns and, in an attempt to meet the demand, an opportunity arose for fern nurseries to set up and provide a variety of UK and imported plants.

John Birkenhead, the author of this guide to fern culture, went into business with his brother and established a fern nursery near Manchester that grew to become the largest and best known of its kind in the world. They exhibited at shows across the country and won many prizes including the Royal Horticultural Society's Gold Medal. They helped to provide a source of plants to satisfy the demand from all walks of society and supplemented this with equipment and supplements and advice to ensure your ferns remained at their best. The endpapers of this book contain numerous interesting and entertaining advertisements for all manner of things fern-related.

Profusely illustrated with detailed drawings and exquisite typographical decorations, the book highlights the deep knowledge of its author. To assist the reader and enthusiast it contains lists of suggested ferns for all types of circumstance and offers detailed advice on their upkeep and maintenance. However, we do advise that today's reader seeks advice from appropriate modern sources that may enhance or discourage the use of certain techniques or practices described in this book. Birkenhead uses Latin names throughout but if you wish to look up the common name we recommend the Hardy Fern Society website (www.hardyferns.org/ferns) which provides an excellent database and glossary.

A reviewer of the time, writing in the *Gardener's Chronicle*, described *Ferns and Fern Culture* as a book 'That no amateur can well dispense with.' Whether you consider yourself an amateur, a professional or just someone with an interest we hope you will agree and maybe it will inspire the pteridomaniac within!





VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

The **Vintage Words of Wisdom** titles are not simply facsimiles of old books. They have been carefully selected and professionally produced as high quality ebooks. Our aim is to make the best vintage books on popular topics of interest more widely available again. The books range from practical titles that include wisdom from times past to unashamedly nostalgic works that will appeal to those who may remember these or similar titles from their childhood. Often amusing and quaint, these vintage volumes also contain wise words and advice that may have been forgotten in the intervening years. So often it is worth revisiting the past to remind ourselves that the best ideas stand the test of time. Above all, the **Vintage Words of Wisdom** titles are highly entertaining and provide a fascinating snapshot of life in days gone by. We have chosen books with wonderful illustrations, exciting stories of daring and adventure, practical advice and charming nostalgic descriptions of a simpler life.

Titles include:

Poultry-keeping

Room and Window Gardening

Ferns and Fern Culture

Woodwork Tools and How to Use Them

Home Carpentry: A Practical Guide for the Amateur

The Boys' Book of Aeroplanes

The Railway Age

Sky Roads of the World

Lillie London's Needlework Book

The Cottage Farm Month by Month

For further details and the most up-to-date information on our titles please visit our website www.wordstothewise.co.uk





PREFACE

FERNS are now in great demand for cultivation in greenhouses, dwelling-houses, and out-door ferneries; also for decoration on special occasions and for cutting. Amateurs in every position of life are taking interest in, and are desirous of cultivating, these plants. The demand for information as to the best kinds to procure, and the proper way to treat them, is so great, that this treatise has been prepared, and it is sent forth in the hope that it may help all its readers to obtain the best results in their efforts to cultivate these beautiful plants.

The aim of the author has been to give simple and clear instructions - avoiding, as far as possible, technical phraseology - and to supply all necessary information, interspersing here and there such remarks as it is hoped may add to the interest and benefit of perusal.

It is not intended for the book to count as a botanical or scientific production, but simply as a practical guide.

The various subjects are necessarily treated briefly, but as the information given is the result of twenty-five years' experience in the cultivation of Ferns, and in the daily study of their requirements, the writer trusts that the remarks, though brief, may prove lucid enough even for the most inexperienced amateur to understand and profit by.

JOHN BIRKENHEAD
Sale, May, 1892.



FERNS AND FERN CULTURE



IT is safe to say there is no class of plants which, taken the year round, gives such continued pleasure and combines such grace, beauty, and utility as Ferns.

It is true they are flowerless plants; nevertheless, they are nearly everybody's favourites. Without introducing an odious comparison, it may be said that orchids, roses, begonias, and other popular plants are attractive and much admired when in flower, yet, when not in flower, they are most unattractive and uninteresting in appearance, but Ferns are always beautiful.

Even those who do not take special interest in Ferns readily acknowledge that flowering plants, or flowers in a cut state, are greatly improved by association with Ferns. As, however, this is not intended to be a plea for Fern culture, but a guide thereto, these remarks will suffice on this point.

The vegetable kingdom is divided into two sections, one consisting of flowering plants, the other of those which are flowerless. Ferns are placed at the head of the latter class. They are of great antiquity, their remains and fossils being found to a large extent in the coal measures, showing that ages ago Ferns grew in this country in luxuriant profusion, and not only in immense numbers but also of enormous size. As the climate of the British Isles has changed, so has its vegetation, and it is necessary now to go to tropical countries to see such Ferns as once flourished here.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the Ferns of our own time and country are of such variety and beauty of form that they will compare favourably with the more tender exotics. Indeed, comparatively few people are aware of the rich profusion of variety there is among British Ferns, all of which may be cultivated with the greatest ease and the most pleasing results.





Section 1



GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF FERNS

FERNS have a wide geographical distribution, and are found in almost every part of the world. One thing, however, is very noticeable - it is that while these plants are found sparingly in some localities, they abound in the greatest profusion in others. There, covering the ground, clothing the mountain sides, creeping up the tree stems, hanging in festoons from the branches, they literally swarm on every side. The cause for this is the combination of warmth, moisture, shade, and shelter. Under such conditions Ferns and their near relatives, Selaginellas, revel.

Here, then, there is an indication of the condition to be copied by cultivators, that such species as are not natives of our own country may be successfully cultivated, and may present to their loving admirers some of the beauty and grace pertaining to them in their natural homes, where few are privileged to see them.

There is probably no other order of plants which has so wide a distribution, and such varied positions and habits of growth. They range from the Tropics, where they are found in greatest profusion, to the Arctic regions, as far north as Greenland. They are found at the sea-level, and up to an altitude of 16,000ft. Some grow only in hot climates, others only in cold; some in dense shade, others in full exposure to the scorching sun. They are found in damp, shady glens, gullies, forests, on mountain sides, in crevices of rocks, in old walls, bridges, and buildings, where it would appear impossible for moisture to penetrate, and where apparently there is no food for the roots to absorb. They flourish on the banks of streams, and in boggy ground; they creep over rocks, up tree stems, along the branches, clothing the trees as completely as ivy often does in this country. Some are so small that their fronds are only about half an inch in length; others are from 15ft. to 20ft. Some have stems, and grow like trees to a height of 40ft. to 50ft. Others have slender wire-like fronds, which grow many yards in length, twining round other plants, and climbing to the tops of tall trees. Indeed, among Ferns, there is every conceivable kind of growth; they grow in all sorts of places, differing entirely in their habits and requirements. Yet, with all this natural diversity, there are no other plants so easily managed.

While it is necessary to have a knowledge of the requirements of each kind in order to attain the highest degree of perfection in their cultivation, and while even with this there may be found now and again a difficult subject to manage, yet the whole family can be satisfactorily cultivated by attention to a few general rules.

RULES FOR FERN CULTURE

These may be summarised thus: The right kind of soil must be provided; the plants must be

potted or planted in a proper manner; they must be watered carefully; they must be kept at a certain temperature during winter and summer, according to that of the places of which they are natives; they should have a moist, quiet atmosphere, free from either cold draughts or currents of hot dry air; and they must have sufficient light at all times, with protection from scorching sun during summer.

This may appear a formidable array of requirements, but it is surprising how easily they may be supplied; besides, the Ferns are usually so accommodating that if they do not get all they want they make the best of that with which they are supplied, and therefore no one need be afraid of attempting their cultivation. It is a most fascinating occupation, and those who begin with a few of the hardier and more easily-managed kinds invariably go on step by step until they become proficient in the management of even the most fastidious variety. Beginning with the common species, their love increases, and they do not rest until possessed of the most highly valued members of the family.

MODES OF GROWTH

In order to understand thoroughly the why and the wherefore of various matters, it will be well to consider first the modes of growth of different species.

Most tropical Ferns are evergreen. The fronds of one season are retained until others are produced the following season, and in some instances fronds remain green on the plants for a number of years. There are a few tropical species which are deciduous - that is, they lose their foliage at a given time, and remain without for a longer or shorter period - but it is among the species of colder climates that the deciduous kinds are most numerous. These, during their period of rest, must not be neglected. It is sometimes thought, by inexperienced cultivators, that when Ferns have lost their foliage they may be put on one side and left without water for weeks. Thus they become dust dry, the roots are injured if not killed outright, and the plants cannot possibly make the vigorous growth the following season that they would if they had been kept continually damp. Those which have lost their foliage should be supplied with water enough to keep them always moist. This will be referred to again under another heading.

The deciduous species are not quite so generally appreciated as those which are evergreen, but it must be said for them that when their new growth does appear it is often exceptionally beautiful, and possesses a freshness specially noticeable in their case. All Ferns consist of three distinct parts, viz., roots, stem, and foliage.

ROOTS

It may seem unnecessary to many to draw attention to this fact, but among those who have not given much thought to the matter the roots and the stems are often confused. It is not necessary to say much about the roots, but it is essential that it should be clearly understood what is meant when roots are mentioned in the pages of this book. They are the thin, wiry-looking fibres produced from the stem which hold the plant in its place, whether in the soil, on rocks, trees, or elsewhere, and they are also the food-seekers of the plant.



ASPLENIUM SEPTENTRIONALE.
(Showing fibrous roots, stem, and fronds.)