

General Fern Care

Light: Ferns do best with indirect lighting. A north-facing window is ideal although during the winter months, when the sun is low on the horizon, an east window is fine for these plants. Avoid south and west-facing windows, as the intense sunlight may scald the leaves or fronds of the ferns, depending on the intensity of the light. They may dry out faster or scald the leaves if there is low moisture in the soil or air.

Fertilizing: Ferns require only light feedings of fertilizer once a month from April through September unless actively growing in winter months. Apply liquid houseplant fertilizer at about ½ the recommended rate. Too much fertilizer will scorch the foliage. Newly potted plants should not be fertilized for four to six months, again unless there are indications of active growth.

Water: Consistent watering, keeping the soil evenly moist, not wet, is also key to the health and well-being of the plants. Overwatering causes the fronds to yellow and wilt and may eventually lead to root rot and fungal diseases, especially if the pot is allowed to sit in water. Too little water also causes wilt. A few varieties, such as Rabbit's Foot Fern, Brake ferns, and Holly Fern are an exception to the consistent watering rule. For these, you may allow the soil to dry out slightly between watering.

Ferns, many of which are native to the tropics, like high humidity, which is why they do well in bathrooms. But you also can increase humidity around the ferns by placing the pots on a pebble-lined tray. Add water to the pebbles, making sure the bottoms of the pots do not touch the water in the tray. The evaporation will add extra humidity around the plants.

In addition, misting the foliage, especially in winter, will increase the humidity. Just be careful not to mist the furniture and outer walls. Use room temperature water as cold water may spot the leaves. You'll know when the humidity is too low as the tips of the fronds will brown or die back. Maidenhair, Staghorn, and Boston Fern are especially susceptible to lack of adequate humidity.