

Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum'



Fronds of *Athyrium niponicum* 'Pictum'

The Perennial Plant Association has named *Athyrium niponicum* 'Pictum' the 2004 Perennial Plant of the Year. This perennial low-maintenance Japanese painted fern is one of the showiest ferns for shade gardens. It is popular due to its hardiness nearly everywhere in the United States, except in the desert and northernmost areas in zone 3. 'Pictum' grows 18 inches tall and as it multiplies can make a clump that is more than two feet wide. 'Pictum' produces 12- to 18-inch fronds that are a soft shade of metallic silver-gray with hints of red and blue. This lovely fern, which prefers partial to full shade, makes an outstanding combination plant for adding color, texture, and habit to landscape beds and containers.

Landscape Uses

The magnificent texture and color of the fronds electrify shady areas of the garden and make the fern a wonderful companion for a variety of shade plants. Japanese painted fern provides a nice contrast to other shade-loving perennials such as hosta, bleeding heart, columbine, astilbe and coral bells. A popular combination is Japanese painted fern with Hosta 'Patriot' and 'Ginko Craig'. For

something different, try *Hosta sieboldiana* 'Elegans'. Another friendly companion plant for the Japanese painted fern is *Tiarella* (foam flower). One of the most unique possibilities is to use this fern with sedges. *Carex* (sedges) are shade-loving, easy-to-grow grasslike plants. Try *Carex morrowii* 'Variegata' or *Carex siderosticha* 'Silver Sceptre'. Other selections that are excellent compliments to Japanese painted fern include *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Langtrees', 'Silver Wings', or 'Jack Frost'; *Lamium maculatum* 'Orchid Frost' and 'Purple Dragon'; *Astilbe* 'Snowdrift'; *Astilbe simplicifolia* 'Sprite'; and *Dicentra* 'King of Hearts'. Use these selections with white flowers or variegated leaves to echo or pick other colors for contrast. Most any plant will make a great counterpart to the graceful, attractive, and versatile *Athyrium niponicum* 'Pictum'.

Cultivation

This fern needs a well-drained, compost-rich soil and flourishes where moisture and humidity abound. 'Pictum' grows best in part-to full shade. The best frond color results in light shade. In the south, a few hours of morning sun will bring out the high colors. In the north they will take more morning sun without sunburning. The colors are more intense in the spring or in cooler temperatures or in cooler climates such as the Northwest. Add 2-3 inches of compost or peat moss to the beds each spring or fall. This fern is extremely reliable when grown in the proper



Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum' does well in shady conditions.

environmental conditions. Its colorful foliage should be vibrant from early spring until frost, when it will go dormant and reemerge with its excellent foliage the next spring.

Propagation

Propagation can be done by tissue culture, spring or fall divisions or by planting spores. Growth habit and color uniformity is not ensured by spore propagation. Tissue culture may be used to clone exceptional plants, which are selected for excellent frond color and growth habit. Excellent selections of Japanese painted fern may also be produced by clump division. It is easy for a homeowner to buy the more colorful and uniform plants in the quantity needed or buy a few and divide the clumps yearly as needed. A well-grown plant can be separated in early spring into 3-4 divisions and replanted. Fertilize at one-half the rate of other perennials with an organic or time-release fertilizer.



This fern stars with other perennials.

brightens landscape beds and containers. Fronds are 12 to 18-inches long and are a soft, metallic, silver-gray with hints of red and blue.

Planting Information: Japanese painted fern performs best in well-drained but moist soil with added organic compost or peat moss. It flourishes where moisture and humidity abound.

– from the Perennial Plant Association webpage (www.perennialplant.org/ppy/04ppy.htm)

Additional Information:

■ *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum* – on the Missouri Botanic Garden's Kemper Center for Home Gardening website at www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/your-garden/plant-finder/plant-details/kc/b640/athyrium-niponicum-var.-pictum.aspx