

Native Ferns & Grasses

For the Cape Cod Container Garden



Flowers are beautiful and help our local pollinators, but they're not the only native plants that benefit local wildlife. Consider these grasses and ferns for lush, green visual interest as well as feeding and housing herbivores.

Grasses

Prairie Dropseed

(*Sporobolus heterolepis*)

Sun – Part shade
Dry, sandy, soils
Pink and brown blooms in June – August
1-3 feet tall; 1-3 foot spread

Larval food plant for Leonard's Skipper, grasshoppers, and leafhoppers.
Provides nesting materials/structure for native bees and small mammals.
Seeds eaten by songbirds.



Northern Sea Oats

(*Chasmanthium latifolium*)

Part shade – Shade
Tolerates a wide range of soils.
Blooms July-September.
Seed heads appear in the fall and persist into winter.
30-48 inches tall

Seedheads are late season food for small mammals and granivorous birds. Larval host for several species of skipper butterfly (family Hesperidae)



Little Bluestem

(*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

Sun – Part Shade, Average to dry soils
Size: 1-3 feet in height; 8-24 inch spread
Larval host for several skipper butterflies.

Seeds are eaten by songbirds.
Food source for grasshoppers, leaf-mining beetles, thrips, spittlebugs, and leafhoppers.
Provides cover for bumble bee queens to make their underground nests.



Ferns

Christmas Fern

(*Polystichum acrostichoides*)

Partial – Full shade,
1-2 feet tall
Medium to Moist,
well-drained soils

Nesting material for
songbirds
Provides winter
cover



Sensitive Fern

(*Onoclea sensibilis*)

Part shade. Tolerates
full sun in wet soils.
Moist to wet, acidic
soils
Up to 3 feet tall

Shelters salamanders
and frogs. Can spread
aggressively, protecting
soil from exotic invasive
spreaders.



Maidenhair Fern

(*Adiantum pedatum*)

Full Shade,
1–3 ft tall
Moist, Rich soils

Provides cover for
invertebrates and
enhances soil
structure



Cinnamon Fern

(*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*)

Shade – Part shade
2-4 feet tall; 2-3 foot
spread
Moist, rich to average
soils

Downy wool used by
hummingbirds and
other birds as nest
lining.



Royal Fern

(*Osmunda regalis*)

Sun – Part shade
1-2 feet tall; 2-3
foot spread
Wet soils

Multiple plants
provide protective
cover for animals
and birds.



Ostrich Fern

(*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)

Shade – Part shade
2-3 feet tall, 2-4 foot
spread
Moist, rich soils

Larval host for several
moth species.
Fiddleheads offer food
for herbivores.



Marsh Fern

(*Thelypteris palustris*)

Full Sun, Medium to wet soil
1-2 feet high and wide

Stabilizes shores and banks.
Only known host plant of the
Marsh Fern Moth



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