

## How to Keep Your Housebound Ferns Healthy



Is your house fern looking sickly, pale or rough? I must admit that I have the same difficulty every Winter. Perhaps these tips will help us both this year. Keep ferns in cooler-than-average rooms, especially during the winter months when some rooms get very warm from heat sources. Ferns love and need humidity. Add extra humidity by lightly misting the plants daily or placing the pots on a pebble tray filled with water. Natural evaporation will increase humidity around the fern. Avoid setting ferns near sources of drafts, heat, or extreme colds such as near doors, appliances, wood stoves and furnace ducts.

Water ferns only as needed. Check the soil before adding water. Thoroughly moisten entire soil area in the pot and pour off any excess that drains through. Do not let the plants sit in water for any length of time or the fronds will yellow or dieback. Dry frond tips may indicate a lack of water and low humidity. If you do a lot of heating in the winter, keep the ferns on a lower shelf rather than hung high near the ceiling.

Don't be heavy handed with fertilizer. Ferns require very little. Feed ferns lightly about three to four times per year with a water-soluble, low nitrogen fertilizer. If fronds yellow, increase to four or five times per year.

To control and prevent pests on ferns, wash the plant completely with a water spray. Be sure to not mistake the brown fuzzy-looking spores on the underside of the leaves for insects. Avoid using pesticides on ferns, as some ferns are quite sensitive to chemical insecticides.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact Ken Churches at [cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu) or (209) 754-6475 with your agricultural questions. To speak with a Certified Master Gardener: Calaveras (209) 754-2880, Tuolumne (209) 533-5696, Amador (209) 223-6837, El Dorado (530) 621-5543.