



Berry Show – Pot Plant Education Series

## Collection of Plants and/or Ferns in one Container - Class 1413

Combining ferns and foliage plants in creative, harmonious arrangements that capture the look and feel of a living landscape.

### Creating a Fern Collection

A fern collection showcases the diversity of frond shapes, textures, and growth habits. The goal is to create a miniature fernery — a balanced display of small and medium ferns that appear to belong together naturally.

#### Design Structure

- Choose one feature fern such as a Bird's Nest, Boston, or Elkhorn.
- Add 3–4 smaller ferns for texture and layering — Button, Maidenhair, Fishbone, or native ground ferns work well.
- Finish with a layer of moss or fine groundcover to soften edges and retain moisture.
- Arrange to create depth: taller ferns toward the back or centre, smaller ones near the front or edge.

### Suggested Combinations

| Feature Fern                                   | Companion Ferns                                | Visual Effect                   |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Bird's Nest ( <i>Asplenium australasicum</i> ) | Button, Maidenhair, Moss                       | Lush, structured, natural.      |
| Boston ( <i>Nephrolepis exaltata</i> )         | Fishbone, Native Maidenhair                    | Soft, arching, layered texture. |
| Elkhorn ( <i>Platycerium bifurcatum</i> )      | Small <i>Asplenium</i> , <i>Pellaea</i> , Moss | Sculptural, contrasting forms.  |

### Potting Mix

- 2 parts premium potting mix
- 1 part peat moss or coco coir for moisture retention
- 1 part fine pine bark or orchid bark
- 1 part perlite or coarse sand for drainage

Choose a pot that is up to 35 cm wide and weighs under 10 kg. Light composite or plastic pots are easiest to handle. Ensure good drainage and a shallow saucer or pebble tray to maintain humidity.

### Creating a Mixed Plant + Fern Collection

This variation allows more creativity by blending ferns with other shade-loving plants. The goal is to create contrast — through colour, texture, and form — while ensuring all species share the same water and light requirements.

#### Design and Compatibility

- Pair ferns with shade-tolerant plants such as Calathea, Peace Lily, Bromeliads, or Begonias.
- Keep foliage harmony — greens dominate; use coloured or variegated leaves sparingly for contrast.
- Maintain balance: one bold centrepiece plant, supported by smaller ferns and trailing species.
- Use moss or fine mulch as a visual connector between plants.

#### Example Combinations

| Feature Plant              | Companion Ferns         | Contrast Goal                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Peace Lily (Spathiphyllum) | Button Fern, Maidenhair | Glossy leaves vs delicate fronds.     |
| Calathea or Maranta        | Bird’s Nest, Fishbone   | Patterned foliage vs solid green.     |
| Bromeliad (Neoregelia)     | Elkhorn offsets, Moss   | Colour accent centre vs green fringe. |

### At-a-Glance Care Calendar

| Month            | Key Tasks                                                                                                                                                | Purpose / Notes                                                   |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| August–September | Plan your design and theme. Decide whether to create an all-fern display or a mixed “mini garden.” Choose a pot or bowl ≤ 35 cm wide with good drainage. | Gives time to plan contrasts — height, texture, colour, and form. |
| October          | Source or propagate plants. Select 3–5 species that thrive in similar light and moisture. Pot individually first if                                      | Early establishment avoids shock when combined later.             |

| Month                       | Key Tasks                                                                                                                                                                                 | Purpose / Notes                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                             | propagating cuttings or divisions.                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                  |
| November                    | Assemble your display. Arrange ferns and companion plants in their final container using a moisture-retentive mix: 2 parts potting mix + 1 part fine bark + 1 part coir + ½ part perlite. | Allows roots to knit and plants to settle before peak summer.                    |
| December                    | Train growth and maintain balance. Rotate weekly to keep an even shape. Remove damaged fronds or leaves. Maintain consistent moisture and humidity.                                       | Builds a natural, cohesive appearance.                                           |
| Early January               | Refine structure and fill gaps. Add small underplantings (e.g. maidenhair, button fern, or moss). Refresh top dressing and stabilise light exposure.                                      | Brings density and layered texture to the design.                                |
| Mid-Late January            | Final grooming. Clean foliage with a damp cloth, remove brown leaves, and check for pests. Replace tired moss or bark.                                                                    | Finishing polish for the bench presentation.                                     |
| Week of the Show (February) | Water one day before benching; mist on the show morning. Clean the pot rim and label if appropriate.                                                                                      | Keeps the mix settled and foliage fresh without surface moisture on judging day. |

## Companion and Reference Resources

- Ferns in Focus: Maidenhair Fern (Class 1411)
- Ferns in Focus: Other Fern Varieties (Class 1412)
- Thrill-Fill-Spill – Designing Mixed Pots (PDF and 30-second video)  
(Part of the Berry Show – Pot Plant Education Series)

## Finding and Learning About Fern and Foliage Varieties

- [Australasian Fern Society](#)
- [Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney Plant Database](#) (native and exotic fern details)