

# Cyrtomium falcatum (Holly Fern)

Holly fern is native to southern Asia and gets its common name from the leaflet's resemblance to the leaves of a holly shrub (rather than the lacy-like fronds of many other ferns). It has escaped cultivation and naturalized in some areas of the southeastern US.

**Common names:**  
Fern Holly, Fish Tail Fern, Holly Fern, Japanese Holly, Japanese Holly Fern

This slow-growing, medium-maintenance fern grows best in moist, humus-rich soil in a shady location (shade through the upper canopy all day, less than 2 hours to no direct sunlight, or direct sunlight only part of the day [2 to 6 hours]). Its native habitats include hardwood forests with moist, cool, well-drained soil.

It has an open, vase shape. Its mature size is 1-ft. 5-in. to 2-ft. high by 2- to 3-ft. wide, with glossy, leathery leaves 3- to 6-in. wide.

Holly Fern can be used as a houseplant as well as outdoors. It can be used in a container, hanging basket, naturalized area, pond, slope/bank, or woodland, where it provides textural interest. Consider it for a rock or shade garden in the border, mass planting, or small groups.

Holly Fern requires no pruning. If frost damages fronds, they can be removed for a neater appearance.

The recommended propagation strategy is by division or seed.

It resists deer, heat, heavy shade, humidity, rabbits, and salt. However, it can become weedy. Scale, fungal spots, and root rot can be issues. Mealybugs and mites will attack when drought weakens the plant.



ABOVE: Close-up of Fronds Eric Hunt [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#) BELOW: Young Leaves Close-Up (Wake County, NC) Cathy Dewitt [CC BY 4.0](#)



By Kathryn Copley, Extension Master Gardener<sup>SM</sup> Volunteer, Brunswick County, NC  
For more information on gardening in Brunswick County, please call the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Office, 910.253.2610.



The spores -- located on the underside of the fronds in a scattered fashion -- are light green when young and darken as they mature. Spores on Fronds CamellaTWU [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

## SOURCES:

[Cyrtomium falcatum \(Aspidium falcatum, Fern Holly, Fish Tail, Fish Tail Fern, Hapanese Netvein Hollyfern, Holly Fern, House Holly Fern, Japanese Holly, Japanese Holly Fern, Polystichum Falcatum\)](#) | [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox \(ncsu.edu\)](#)