

# Adiantum spp. Maidenhair Fern<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This extremely fine-textured, delicate, airy fern is a graceful addition to shady, moist outdoor landscapes or bright, indirect light locations indoors. Its light grey-green, soft foliage adds a quieting feeling to any landscape, particularly around a water feature in the garden. It is best planted in mass on two- to three-foot centers, but can be used as an edging or specimen in a small garden area. A North American native, maidenhair fern also makes an excellent groundcover, spreading easily on creeping stems.



Figure 1. Full form—*Adiantum* spp.: maidenhair fern.  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Adiantum* spp.

**Pronunciation:** ad-ee-AN-tum species

**Common name(s):** maidenhair fern

**Family:** *Pteridaceae*

**Plant type:** perennial; herbaceous

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9 through 11 (Figure 2)

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** mass planting; container or above-ground planter; ground cover; edging

**Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 2 to 3 feet

**Spread:** 2 to 3 feet

**Plant habit:** weeping; round

**Plant density:** moderate

1. This document is FPS13, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised November 2017. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Edward F. Gilman, professor; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant; and Gail Hansen, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound

**Leaf margin:** serrate

**Leaf shape:** orbiculate; ovate

**Leaf venation:** parallel

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** no flowers

**Flower characteristic:** no flowers

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** no fruit

**Fruit length:** no fruit

**Fruit cover:** no fruit

**Fruit color:** no fruit

**Fruit characteristic:** no fruit

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not applicable

**Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade

**Soil tolerances:** occasionally wet; clay; sand; acidic; loam

**Drought tolerance:**

**Soil salt tolerances:** poor

**Plant spacing:** 18 to 24 inches

## Other

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Needing above-average humidity, maidenhair fern grows in partial to full shade on well-drained soils with high organic matter but does not tolerate dry soil. The southern maidenhair and brittle maidenhair grow best in alkaline soils while others grow best in acid soils. It will cascade over the side of a container in a shady garden spot.

Some of the available species include: *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, southern maidenhair, 1.5 feet tall; *A. hispidulum*, rosy maidenhair, one-foot-tall, young fronds rosy brown; *A. pedatum*, western maidenhair, 1 to 2.5 feet tall, most popular one grown; and *A. peruvianum*, silver dollar maidenhair, 1.5 feet or more tall, leaf segments quite large, up to 2 inches wide.

Propagation is by division or spores.

## Design Considerations

The small size, tiny leaves, and delicate form of the Maidenhair fern make it perfect for containers and small scale, special spaces in the landscape. Companion plants should have larger, smooth leaves to contrast with the tiny multiple leaves of the fern. Simple forms and dark green or smooth foliage of companion plants will highlight the delicate foliage. The medium green of the fern leaves will work well with different flower colors, but deep or bright colors will show better than light pastels. Simple small or medium size flowers will contrast more with the tiny foliage without adding too much detail.

## Pests and Diseases

Problems include scale, mites, mealy bugs, snails, and slugs, but are usually not serious.

Maidenhair fern is susceptible to root rot in soil that is kept too wet.

