

Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*)

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Several ferns are WaterWise and can be grown in dryer conditions locally. Perhaps the most versatile is our very own sword fern, *Polystichum munitum*. This species grows in many habitats in the Pacific Northwest, but is perhaps most prevalent in shaded forests. However, in gardens, the sword fern can also tolerate moderate to nearly full sun. Once established, additional water is not necessary, although the plants may look more attractive if given a little water during particularly dry times. As with all plants, additional water during the establishment phase is important. For some nice photographs, including the one shown here, go to the OSU plant identification website: <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/3plants.htm#pomu>. That site also mentions a subspecies, *Polystichum munitum* var. *imbricans*, which is a shorter form that actually prefers sun over shade.

Sword fern is evergreen, with new fronds unfurling each year during the growing season. For esthetic reasons, some people prefer to prune out the old fronds each year, or even cut back all foliage before the new fronds emerge. This produces a smaller plant overall, which some people prefer as a management tool. On the other hand, it is an extra garden chore (a matter of personal preference) and does remove hiding places for amphibians and beneficial insects.

It is native to western North America, from Alaska to California and east to Montana. Transplanting is nearly always successful, so if you have plenty of ferns on your property, you might consider relocating some into a garden setting. Get ready, however, to spend some time getting the highly fibrous root system free from its native soil. Sword fern is also readily available in nurseries. If you would like to try your hand at propagating them from spores, look for instructions at the following Washington State University website: <http://depts.washington.edu/propplnt/Plants/Swordfern.htm>.

