**Deer Fern (Blechnum spicant)**  
Chain Fern Family

---

**Why Choose It?**

If you are looking for an elegant addition to your shade garden, you could not do better than to plant Deer Fern. Its dark green, shiny, leathery fronds and purple-black stems (called *stipes* in ferns) make this a standout among the ferns. Its interesting texture and tidy look make it a perfect companion to other woodland plants.

**In the Garden**

Deer Fern makes a wonderful small-scale ground cover, and its attractive fronds make it a great stand-alone plant as well as a useful component of a shady, woodland garden. These ferns produce two types of fronds, a characteristic that separates them from other ferns. The sterile, or non-spore producing fronds form a low-growing rosette around the fertile fronds, which can grow to a height of 2 to 3 feet, giving the plant an almost “blooming” look.

**The Facts**

Deer Fern is quite versatile. It prefers moist, shady locations, but can grow in a fair amount of sun if given enough water through the summer. It is virtually maintenance free, and requires only a little pruning to remove the fertile fronds once they begin to die back in the fall and winter. Deer Fern is very hardy, and the sterile fronds remain green throughout the winter. Combine Deer Fern with other woodland natives, such as *Trillium ovatum*, *Achlys triphylla* (Vanilla Leaf), or even other ferns!

**Where to See It**

Native throughout the northwest and into Alaska, Deer Fern grows in moist forests from the coast to subalpine elevations. You’ll find it growing in the shade of Western Red Cedar, Western Hemlock and Red Alder, and along stream banks.
And by the way:

Deer Fern may have acquired its name because it is an important source of winter forage for deer and elk. Another theory is that after watching deer that had recently lost their antlers rub the stubs on the plant, fronds were used by some native people to treat skin ailments.

You can find out more information about native plants, including where to buy them, from the Washington Native Plant Society.

www.wnps.org

Native Plant Spotlights

Adapted from writing by Cynthia Spurgeon

© WNPS