

NATIONAL PLANT COLLECTION®

Athyrium filix femina



Athyrium filix-femina 'Plumosum Druery'

'Lady Ferns'

Mr N. Schroeder

Near Hayward's Heath, West Sussex
(Visitors by appointment only)
Cultivation notes by J. Reed

INTRODUCTION - HABIT & USES

The normal habit of *Athyrium* is fairly upright with a loose, shuttlecock shape. But the many varieties can be both low mound forming or very tall, and some are extremely feathery. They love growing in damp shade and in the wild prefer more acid soils but will grow in any well prepared soil. If they have plenty of water they will grow in sun to a good size very quickly. They die down at the first frost but are very hardy!

Athyrium are ideal for pool side planting or damp shady areas. They work well planted amongst winter flowering bulbs as they come up after they have finished and their light filigree foliage ranges from deep green to glorious lemon feathery elegance which lights up any shady area.

PROPAGATION

This is normally by spores for the common varieties as they come fairly true but others need to be done by division or the use of specialist techniques.

FEEDING

Very little is required if the soil is well prepared beforehand. A good mulch of compost in spring is all that they need.

In pots give a liquid feed of tomato food at half strength once a month, from when growth starts, until the end of August, then let the plants harden up for winter.

PESTS & DISEASES

Generally trouble free but like any plant it can get vine weevil and also fern weevil. Treat both problems as per vine weevil with a pesticide or nematodes.

HISTORY

Athyrium is a genus of 180 species of terrestrial woodland ferns native to both temperate and tropical areas. It wasn't until 1633 that *Athyrium* became separated from other fern genera. Linnaeus named the first specimen *Polypodium filix-femina* but it eventually became *Athyrium*. They are known as Lady Ferns from the Greek/Latin name of *Athyrium filix-femina*, which translates as Female Fern. This was because of their elegant nature. However ferns are neither male or female (see leaflet on the life cycle of ferns). *Dryopteris filix-mas* is known as the Male Fern because of its robust (masculine) nature.

Some of the choicest varieties were developed around the turn of the 1900s. The Plumosum varieties were developed from wild finds especially J.Trot's *A. filix-femina* 'Plumosum Axminster' which was found in 1863. This started what became known as the Plumosum explosion amongst fern growers. These were regarded as the elite for the show bench being some of the most stunning plants along with *A. filix-femina* 'Plumosum Percristatum'.

This National Collection holds a lot of the rarest cultivars and can be likened to an ark that helps to ensure their conservation.