

TREE FERNS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Concluded from last issue

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Cibotium schiedei is considered by some to be the most beautiful fern in existence. It is now planted quite extensively out-of-doors in lathhouses or protected and sheltered coastal areas. The golden-green fronds are produced in great profusion, and they droop gracefully. Excellent if planted high on top of a wall so that the fronds are permitted to cascade down. It is also suited for hanging baskets and is well known for its decorative qualities indoors. Will withstand temperatures of 20° if established outside for several years.

Cibotium chamissoi, a Hawaiian species of tree fern, has a heavy trunk with arched fronds of a glossy texture and golden green hue. Average height in Southern California is 4 to 6 feet. Since the fronds are produced less numerous on imported trunks, this fern is often used in front of ornate stone or wood structures. Sporelings will produce more fronds.

Cibotium menziesii is not too common in Southern California and distinguishes itself from other species by having darker green, shiny and leathery leaves produced on dark, hairy stems. It is not so tolerant of sunlight as the above-mentioned species *C. chamissoi*.

Blechnum braziliense, a dwarf tree fern, has become quite popular. Its beautiful mahogany-tinged foliage makes it a charming subject for well protected situations. In appearance it closely resembles a cycad and is therefore quite exotic looking. It requires a very sheltered location. In Brazil and Peru it produces a 4 to 5-foot trunk and 3 to 5-foot fronds.

Closely allied to *B. braziliense* is *Lomaria gibba*, a very symmetrical dwarf tree fern requiring a warm location with no overhead watering during the winter months. Truly a beautiful fern, it should

be planted in pots or open ground in a semi-outdoor environment. In New Caledonia this fern produces a trunk 5 feet tall, and its gracefully, arching fronds are said to grow from 3 to 4 feet long.

To obtain best results with tree ferns one should select a sheltered, frost-protected area free from dry winds, and provide a well-drained moisture-retaining soil which is rich in humus. To avoid disturbing surfact roots, do not cultivate but mulch frequently with rough leafmold and cedar or redwood bark. Fresh stable manure should not be used. A well balanced organic acid plant food or an acid liquid fertilizer, diluted to one-half of recommended strength, and applied three times from May to September will provide nutrients for good frond development. Too much nitrogen tends to give fronds a weaker structure. During warm summer weather, a late afternoon or evening overhead watering creates a moist, cool condition so beneficial to most tree ferns.

When removing old fronds do not pull or tear them from the trunks, but remove them with a sharp knife or pruning shears, leaving a portion of the leaf base attached to the trunk for insulation and frost protection. Eventually these leaf remains will detach themselves or can be easily removed.

Should insects such as scale, mealybug, red spider and thrips appear, spray with the latest approved and safe spray materials.

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"If you have once planted a tree for other than commercial purposes,—and in that case it is usually done by your orders and by the hands of hirelings,—you have always in it a peculiar interest. You care more for it than you care for all the forests of Norway or America. *You* have planted it, and that is sufficient to make it peculiar amongst the trees of the world."

ALEXANDER SMITH



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