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Staghorn Fern Care: Growing Platycerium bifurcatum



The Staghorn Fern is a unique living wall decor. It's often mounted, similar to how the plant grows on trees and natural surfaces.

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How to Grow, Care, and Mount Your Staghorn Fern

By [Lauren Landers](#)

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If you've been on the hunt for a new plant with unique charm, look no further than staghorn ferns with their antler-like fronds. These epiphytic plants can be grown outdoors in warm climates or indoors as houseplants. With the help of this guide, you can master the art of keeping staghorn ferns—and even learn how to mount your ferns for display!

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About Staghorn Ferns

Belonging to the *Platycerium* genus, staghorn ferns are native to the humid rainforests of Australia, Southeast Asia, and Africa, and they're mostly known for their distinctive look and growth habit.

While there are about 18 different species of staghorn ferns, *P. bifurcatum* is the most common variety with fuzzy, silvery-green fronds that grow up to 3 feet in length. Other types of staghorn ferns have

harder to grow, and their frond size may vary.



Staghorn ferns are epiphytes and they naturally grow on trees. Credit: Huaykwang

Unlike most other ferns, staghorn ferns are epiphytes, growing outdoors on vertical surfaces such as trees and in the nooks and crannies of rocks. As a result, these ferns are at their best when displayed in hanging baskets or wall mounts, and they often develop root rot when cultivated in pots. Providing staghorn ferns with plenty of bright, indirect light is essential for their growth, and indoor plants usually need extra humidity to keep their fronds from browning.

Most growers cultivate staghorn ferns as

up. Just keep in mind that staghorn ferns can grow aggressively in warm areas and are known to be [invasive in Florida and Hawaii](#). That said, staghorn ferns grow relatively slowly in cooler climates, and, best of all, they're nontoxic to pets!

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PLANTING



Mounting a staghorn fern. Pressing the roots into a mount of moss on a wooden surface. Credit Andriana Syvanych

Staghorn ferns produce two types of fronds, and these fronds need to be handled a bit differently when staghorn ferns are planted. **Basal or shield fronds** are relatively round and turn brown with age, and they emerge from the bottom of the plant to shelter the fern's tufted roots.

Foliar or reproductive fronds, on the other hand, are larger and have a bright green color and forked shape, and they sprout from the plant's basal fronds and eventually produce spores.

Young staghorn ferns can be planted in pots filled with a well-draining potting mix by gently nestling the plant's roots and basal fronds into the top of the pot-

How to Mount a Staghorn Fern

If you want to mount and hang a new staghorn fern on your wall, follow along with these quick and easy steps!

1. Select a surface for mounting your staghorn fern. Many growers mount staghorn ferns on wooden boards or wall plaques, but they can also be mounted on logs, sturdy pieces of bark, or other natural materials.
2. Remove the fern from its nursery pot and gently shake the roots to remove potting soil.
3. Mound a handful or two of sphagnum moss, compost, or other organic matter onto the surface where you'll be mounting your fern, and then press the base of the fern's roots and basal fronds into the organic matter.
4. Secure the fern to the wall mount by wrapping the basal fronds and planting substrate, and mount with wire, mesh, or clear fishing line until the plant is secure. The reproductive

in and cover the wire or

line wrapping.

5. After securing the plant to its mount,

give the plant a deep drink of water by soaking the mount, plant, and substrate in your sink and letting it drip dry.

6. Hang the wall mount in a spot with

bright, indirect light, and enjoy your new fern plant!

GROWING



Growing staghorn ferns in hanging baskets. Credit: ChaiyonS021

If you've successfully grown Boston ferns and other fern plants in your home or garden, there's a good chance you'll have success with staghorn ferns, too.

Although these plants are a little fussy

can live for 50 years or more with proper care.

Light

Indoor staghorn ferns grow best in bright, indirect light, while outdoor plants thrive in partial sun. The important thing is to keep these plants out of direct light. Too much sun can burn their sensitive leaves!

Water

Staghorn ferns need to be watered regularly, but they don't like to sit in soggy soil. The best way to water mount staghorn ferns is to fill up your sink with water and soak your fern and its mount for about 20 minutes. Remove the fern from the water, allow it to drip dry, rehang the plant, and only water again when the plant's substrate feels dry.

Fertilizer

While ferns don't need a lot of fertilizer,

staghorn ferns with a diluted liquid fertilizer applied as part of your regular watering schedule. If you prefer to use granular fertilizers, follow the dosing instructions on your fertilizer packaging and tuck an appropriate amount of slow-release granular fertilizer around your plant's basal fronds.

Humidity

Low humidity is one of the most common causes of distress in staghorn ferns and can cause foliar fronds to turn brown, dry out, and drop. To avoid this, mist ferns are kept regularly throughout the day or near a humidifier or in a well-lit and steamy bathroom. Humidity levels around 60 to 75% are ideal for these plants!

Seasonal Care

If you keep staghorn ferns outdoors in summer, move your plants back inside before temperatures drop below 50°F. Cold weather will damage their fronds and

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During winter, withhold all fertilizer and reduce watering too. If you usually water your plants about once a week in summer, only water about once every 2 to 3 weeks in winter. Basal fronds should never be removed from staghorn ferns, but foliar fronds can be pruned away if they're damaged or withered.

Propagation

Most staghorn ferns can be propagated from spores or plant division, but division is generally the easier option!

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- To divide staghorn ferns, wait until the plants produce smaller offsets or “pups,” and cut the baby plants away with a sharp, sterilized knife. Each pup should have some roots and a few basal and foliar fronds.
- Pot the fern divisions into small pots filled with a well-draining potting mix or compost mixed with coco coir, and keep the plants warm and moist in indirect sun until they root. This can take a while, so be patient!
- Once the pups are rooted, mount them like the parent plant!

Types



P. bifurcatum is the most common and easiest-to-grow staghorn fern. However, adventurous gardeners may want to explore other staghorn varieties, like:

- *P. andinum* is the only staghorn fern species native to the Americas. This plant produces notably thin fronds that grow over 5 feet in length!
- *P. superbum* is native to Australia and produces 2- to 3-foot-long fronds that may stand erect or droop beneath the plant. Because it doesn't produce offsets, this fern can only be propagated from spores.
- *P. veitchii* is a little easier to grow than many other staghorn ferns and stays small. Plus, its pretty, bluish-green fronds tolerate more sun than most staghorns!

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

Staghorn ferns are relatively pest- and disease-proof. But these plants can still develop issues from time to time.

Whether you grow these plants indoors or out, here are a few common problems to watch for.

- **Pests**, like scale, mealybugs, spider mites, and aphids can cause leaf discoloration and leave a sticky “honeydew” on affected plants. Treat these pests with an organic, insecticidal soap: spray at 7 to 10 day intervals.

this occurs, prune away the damage and spot treat with neem oil or another organic fungicide.

- **Wilting or fronds that turn black at the base** are signs of watering issues. Water your plants more if they start to wilt, but reduce watering if they turn black!

WIT AND WISDOM

- If your staghorn fern looks like it's covered in a fine white powder, don't rub that "dust" away! Staghorn fern fronds are coated in fuzzy hairs or "trichomes" that protect the plant from sun damage and desiccation.
- In the wild, staghorn ferns capture natural materials, like fallen leaves and bird droppings, with their basal fronds. Over time, this organic matter breaks down and feeds the plant's roots like a natural fertilizer!
- Staghorn ferns are also sometimes called elkhorn ferns. These two names can be used interchangeably, or you

HOUSEPLANT GUIDES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lauren is a gardener, writer, and public speaker with over a decade of experience helping others learn about gardening, homesteading, and sustainable living. [Read More from Lauren Landers](#)

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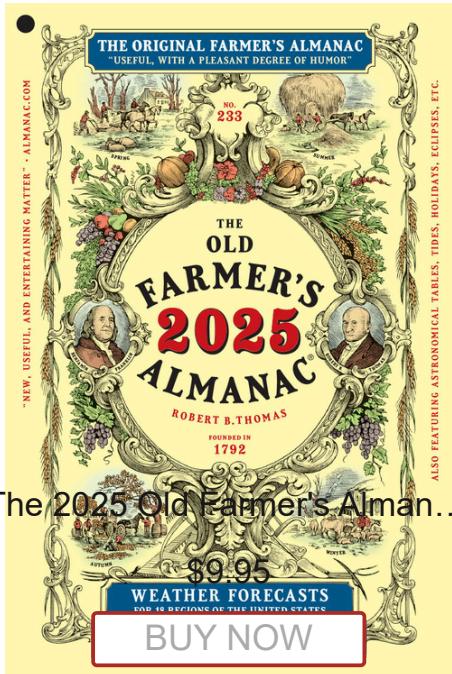
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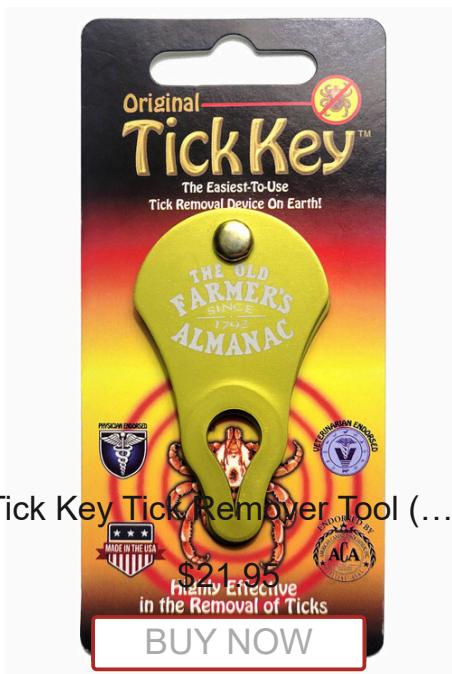


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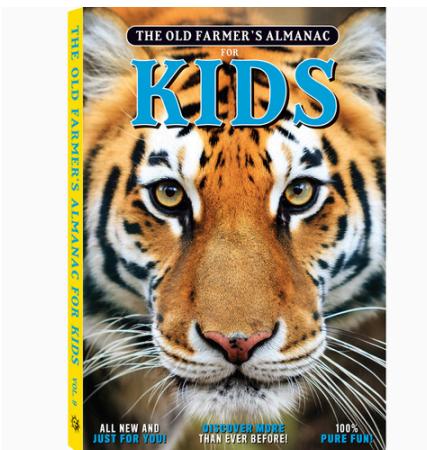


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