

How to care for Staghorn Fern plaques

Description

Staghorn ferns are epiphytes; a horticultural term which refers to plants that grow perched on objects such as tree branches. Other examples of epiphytes are air plants (*Tillandsia* species) and many species of orchids.

Staghorn ferns produce two types of fronds. The large 'antler-shaped' fertile fronds jut out from the centre of the plant and produce spores on the underside. The sterile basal fronds or 'shield fronds' are round or kidney-shaped fronds located at the base of the fern. The shield fronds protect the roots of the plant and also absorb moisture and nutrients. It's normal for older shield fronds to eventually turn brown as the fern matures. Dried, brownish shield fronds should never be removed.

Light Requirements

Staghorn ferns should be situated indoors in an area when they will receive bright diffuse light for most of the day. The ferns should not be placed in front of unfiltered south or east windows during the summer months, as intense sunlight can scorch the fronds.

Watering

The watering schedule for staghorn ferns will vary throughout the year. During the warm summer months, the entire fern can be soaked once a week by placing the wooden plaque plant-side down in a basin or sink. The fern should be soaked for 10 – 20 minutes and allowed to drip dry. During the winter months, the soaking schedule should be reduced to once every two or three weeks, depending upon the humidity of the growing area. If the air in the room is very dry, the plant may require additional soaking & misting. In general epiphytic plants are susceptible to root rot caused by over-watering. The rootball of staghorn ferns should be allowed to dry out slightly in between soakings.

Misting

Both the antler fronds and the shield fronds of staghorn ferns are capable of absorbing water and nutrients. Periodic misting of the plant between soakings will keep the fronds hydrated and help to compensate for low household humidity.

Feeding

Staghorn ferns can be fed monthly from mid-spring until early autumn and approximately every two months during the winter. The fertilizer can be added to the water prior to soaking the fern or applied to the fronds with a spray-bottle. Specialty epiphyte fertilizers such as Epiphyte's Delight are mixed with water according to the manufacturer's instructions. If a regular plant fertilizer is used, it should contain a balanced formula, such as 10-10-10 or 15-15-15. Regular plant fertilizers are intended for potted plants and should be mixed at 1/4 strength when used as a foliar spray or dip for staghorn ferns.