

Asparagus densiflorus 'Sprengerii' Sprengerii Asparagus Fern¹

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Introduction

'Sprengerii' Asparagus Fern is a rounded herbaceous perennial that is used in the landscape for its attractive, fine-textured foliage. This 1 to 4 foot-tall plant has true leaves that are scale-like and inconspicuous. The structures that most refer to as leaves are actually leaf-like branchlets called cladophylls. These tiny cladophylls are linear, flattened structures that are bright green in color. They occur singly or in groups of 3 or more at a node. The stems of this plant emerge directly from the ground and become woody and spiny, so be careful when handling this species. The thorns cause significant irritation to many people that handle the plant. Pretty, red, ovoid berries occur on *Asparagus densiflorus* throughout the year. Several birds eat and probably distribute the fruit. These fruits follow tiny, white, flowers that occur in axillary racemes; the flowers are inconspicuous for the most part but fragrant. Seeds germinate in the landscape and the plant has escaped into natural habitats in parts of Florida. It can also become a weed in your landscape.



Figure 1. Full form—*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Sprengerii' Sprengerii asparagus fern.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Asparagus densiflorus* 'Sprengerii'

Pronunciation: ass-SPAR-uh-gus den-sif-FLOR-us

Common name(s): 'Sprengerii' asparagus fern

Family: *Liliaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous; perennial

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: potentially invasive

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Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; groundcover; border; cascading down a wall; suitable for growing indoors

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 3 to 4 feet

Plant habit: spreading; round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: less than ½ inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristic: attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun; plant grows in the shade

Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: good

Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

This charming perennial can be used in the landscape as a border plant or ground cover. It can be maintained by clipping to any height up to 2 feet tall. It suits a container well and is beautiful if trained to cascade over a wall. When the root system fills the container, remove the root ball from the pot, split it apart and replant a portion of it back into the container. The rest of the root ball can be planted in other containers. One may also use asparagus fern in mixed shrub groupings.

This plant is adaptable to various well-drained soils and will flourish in full sun or partial shade. The foliage of asparagus fern is killed by frost, but the plant will recover quickly in the southern portion of hardiness zone 8. It is very drought tolerant and will survive in hot, dry locations, although it will grow slower in dry locations.

The berries of *Asparagus densiflorus* contain 1 or 2 black, hard seeds that can be used for propagation; the seeds germinate in 4 to 6 weeks. This plant may also be propagated by cuttings and division.

Other cultivars include 'Myers' with stiffly erect stems, dense foliage forming narrow plumes about 2 feet tall.

Design Considerations

The Sprengeri Asparagus Fern has a clumping, arching, form that resemble mounds when grown in clusters. The arching branches cascade nicely over container edges or garden walls. Use caution in planters around patios as the thorns can cause irritation. Companion plants should have large, smooth leaves to contrast with the tiny needle-like branches of the fern. Simple forms and dark green or smooth foliage of companion plants will highlight the delicate foliage. The light to medium green of the fern will work well with different flower colors, but deep or bright colors will show better than light pastels. Simple small or medium size flowers will contrast more with the tiny foliage and white, yellow, and blue flowers will complement the bright red berries.

Pest and Diseases

Except for mites, none of major concern.