



## ***Sphaeropteris cooperi* Australian Tree Fern<sup>1</sup>**

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Edward F. Gilman<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

The Australian tree fern is a tropical, single-trunked, giant fern that can reach a height of 15 to 30 feet. It has long, bipinnately compound, lacy leaves that give it a fine texture. The 1- to 1 1/2-foot-long leaves form a handsome canopy and impart a tropical effect. The fern produces one trunk that is woolly or russet in appearance, and it may attain a diameter of 1 foot. This plant reproduces by spores found on the undersides of mature leaves.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Sphaeropteris cooperi*

**Pronunciation:** spheer-rop-TEER-riss KOOP-per-rye

**Common name(s):** Australian tree fern

**Family:** *Cyatheaceae*

**Plant type:** tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 1)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** near a deck or patio; specimen; border; suitable for growing indoors

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

### **Description**

**Height:** 12 to 18 feet

**Spread:** 8 to 15 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** open

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** fine

### **Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** spiral

**Leaf type:** odd-pinnately compound

**Leaf margin:** entire

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.



**Figure 1.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf shape:** lanceolate

**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:** no flowers

**Flower characteristic:** no flowers

#### **Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** no fruit

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch

**Fruit cover:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** no fruit

**Fruit characteristic:** no fruit

#### **Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** no thorns; usually with one stem/trunk

**Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

#### **Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in the shade

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; sand; loam; clay

**Drought tolerance:**

**Soil salt tolerances:** poor

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

#### **Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## **Use and Management**

Australian tree fern is delightful as a specimen plant in a shaded garden. It is often planted around a shaded pool or small pond for the double image created on the water. This is a wonderful landscape plant where winter temperatures do not drop below freezing. It is sure to illicit a comment from friends and passersby.

Australian tree fern prefers fertile, well-drained, sandy loam soils. An area in the landscape that receives partial to full shade is best. This plant requires regular moisture, and it needs light fertilizing at regular intervals during the growing season.

Australian tree fern is propagated by sowing the spores found on the undersides of mature leaves.

## **Pests and Diseases**

Australian tree fern is bothered by mites and mealy bugs, and termites may inhabit its trunk. It usually resists diseases.