

THE DINING-TABLE FERNERY

By Joseph Kift, Jr.

THE dainty silver and china ferneries filled with growing specimens of "Nature's lace work," which form the central decoration of dinner-tables in homes of taste and refinement, are a rather recent acquisition and a very great improvement on the pyramidal designs of fruit and flowers, as inartistic and ugly as they were universal and obscuring, which they have replaced. This growing of ferns for use as a table decoration is a very beautiful idea, but it will prove a very costly one if the method of caring for these delicate plants is not better understood and followed.

When selecting a fernery carefully refrain from choosing one that in shape resembles a pieplate. Such a one is no use at all on account of its shallowness; the plants must have room or they will dry out. Select one, rather, that is not less than three inches deep, and that does not flange outward. Ferns cannot be planted on the flange, consequently the whole effect of the idea is lost, for to be attractive the fernery must be entirely covered with growth, consequently one with straight sides is needed. When filling it plant to the outside edge and the foliage will droop gracefully all around. The soil used for filling should consist of three parts of leaf-mould or peat and two equal parts of loam and sand thoroughly pulverized and mixed. When ready to transfer the plants from the pots to the fernery carefully turn the plants upside down, place two fingers on the soil and tap the edge of the pot sharply on a table. If the plants are in a moist condition (and you should never plant any ferns when dry) with one tap the whole ball of roots with soil will leave the pot. When all the plants are out of the pots stand the plants together in the fernery prettily and tastefully, without disturbing the roots, and then fill in the soil around them, pressing it firmly with your thumbs and fingers, and then give the fernery a good soaking of water, being careful to spray the foliage thoroughly.

The plants selected for the fernery should be well rooted, with firm foliage and not too young; the soil of young plants is too soft and they are too tender to stand the dry air of the house. The commonest hardy greenhouse varieties are the best for this purpose. There is only one variety of the maiden-hair fern that will thrive in the dry air of the house. It is the "*Adiantum Capillus Veneris*." This variety does not form a crown as do most of the maiden-hair ferns, but creeps over the surface of the soil, and is very graceful and hardy. After each meal is over remove the fernery from the dining-table, and give the foliage a gentle spraying, and take it to a cool room and place it on a stand in the window until the hour for the next meal arrives. The stand should be somewhat larger than the fernery. Over all turn a bell glass or globe, large enough to clear the entire growth without touching. The bell glass should have a hole in the top about one inch across. This hole serves the two-fold purpose of acting as a convenient handle and also as an outlet for excessive moisture, as well as to protect the plants from the dry atmosphere of the house. If there is no outlet at the top of the glass the moisture will gather on the inside, and the little plants will soften and gradually decay, and the soil at the roots will be apt to become pasty and sour. If you cannot secure a bell glass as described, a glass case, similar to a small showcase, with a lid which can be kept raised slightly, will answer.

Never allow the fernery to become too dry but be careful not to over-water. The soil should at all times be damp but never soggy. If it is not convenient to procure greenhouse ferns the common hardy evergreen rock ferns of the woods will answer. They may be found in many places growing on very large rocks. Lift a bunch large enough for the purpose in one bunch or sod, and transfer it carefully to your fernery. Very soon the fronds of the fern will be found falling in every direction as the stem is somewhat weak near the surface of the soil. To straighten them up nicely take some soft green sheet moss from the woods, pull it apart and pack it carefully in among the fronds. This will hold them just where you want them. A fernery filled with these evergreen wood ferns will last for quite a long time if treated in every way just as I have suggested for the greenhouse ferns.