

Scientific Name:

***Asparagus densiflorus***  
**'Myers'**

Common Names:

foxtail fern, cat's tail fern, asparagus fern, basket asparagus (Eng); katstert, smaragsiervaring (Afr); isiqobola, umcagcazane, uvelabahleke (isiZulu)

Conservation Status

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Near-Threatened (NT)



Photo credit: Kerileigh Lobban

**Plant Type / Size** Herbaceous perennial / Small-Medium

Although commonly called a fern it is not a true fern. It is actually a member of the same family as the edible asparagus vegetable. A very attractive plant that is fairly drought-resistant and flourishes with little care. Bearing small, bright green, needle-like leaves on fronds (up to 1m long) that resemble a cat's tail. Has extensive root systems with fairly large tubers that store water and help the plant survive long periods of drought. Flowers appear along the frond stems and are tiny and white or pale pink, and sweetly scented. These fruit into green berries which turn bright, showy and red when ripe. Stems can be woody and are armed with sharp spikes.

**Flowering Season:**

Periodically throughout the year.  
Great shows once every 1 – 3 years

Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
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**Drought Tolerance**

Low	Moderate	High
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Salt tolerant.

**Gardening Skill Needed**

Low	Moderate	High	Expert
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**Pot Plant Potential**

Poor	Moderate	Good	Excellent
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Repot in spring.

**Water Regime**

Water moderately throughout the year but sparingly in winter. The tuberous roots store water, so do not over water - it can lead to root rot. Allow the top 8 cm of soil to dry out between waterings. This plant loves to be misted.



**Soil Type**

Grows best in well-draining slightly acidic soil. Tolerates most soil types. Fertilise with rich organic compost.

**Ideal Position**

Semi-shade. Needs bright light but avoid hot afternoon summer sun. Prefers humid air.



**How to Propagate**

**Divide overcrowded tubers:** Divide overcrowded tubers: In spring. Cleanly cut through the thick roots. Avoid pulling and tearing them. Entirely cover tubers with well-draining soil.

**Seeds:** Remove seed from ripe, fleshy berries. Allow to dry. Sow in spring or early summer in a suitable sowing medium. Keep moist and in a warm spot (about 25°C).

**Maintenance Tips**

Fertilise when the needle-like leaves turn pale or yellow. Prune back yellowing stems to encourage new growth. Pruning stems keeps the fern compact and bushy. It is helpful to spread a thick mulch of compost around the plants.

**Uses**

**Ornamental:** A popular accent plant in small gardens or rockeries. Ideal in coastal gardens. Excellent container plant and is very effective in a hanging basket.



**Medicinal:** Used in traditional medicine in South Africa.



**Animal Interaction / Ecology**

Flowers attract insects. Birds, such as weavers, white-eyes, thrushes, bulbuls, barbets and robin-chats, eat and disperse the fleshy red berries.



**Fun Fact**

The foliage stems/plumes are effective in flower arrangements and can last up to 3 weeks without yellowing or littering leaflets.