

JUDITH I. JONES
“The Fern Madame”

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Biographical and Business Background

Fancy Fronds Temperate Fern Nursery was established in 1977 to market a burgeoning population of spore grown temperate ferns. I began to grow ferns in response to the demand for more unusual as well as difficult to find Northwest native ferns for the University of Washington Arboretum Foundation plant sale. As my interest and contacts grew nationally and internationally I was encouraged to offer ferns by mail-order. In 1982 my first mail-order list was sent out at the instigation of Dr. John Mickel of New York Botanical Garden.

I have been fortunate in the number of people who have encouraged me in this avocation so far removed from my original field of study in children's theater and 18th and 19th century English literature and drama. The most influential contribution to my pteridophyte education came from James W. Dyce, M.B.E., who was the guiding force behind the British Pteridological Society for many decades. Jimmy, as he was fondly known by those interested in ferns world-wide, took me under his tutelage via copious correspondence and visits to become well versed in the history and recognition of Victorian fern cultivars. His infectious passion for ferns met with a receptive student eager to imbibe his incredible wealth of information. He opened the way to many contacts around the world with fern enthusiasts, growers, and botanists.

In the United States I had the encouragement of people such as Neil Hall,, longtime spore exchange director of the American Fern Society, Lawrence Crocker, co-founder of Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery, Dr. John Mickel, pteridologist and curator of ferns at New York Botanical Garden, Dr. Barbara Hoshizaki, professor emeritus at Los Angeles City College and research associate at UCLA, and Dr. Irving Knobloch, professor at Michigan State University.

In 1980 I met Torben Barfod, landscaper and nurseryman, and gradually began a collaboration that by my departure in 1995 was producing one of the most comprehensive selections of temperate ferns from spores and vegetative propagation in the United States. Torben Barfod's generous sharing of nursery knowledge and materials, made the move to develop my own growing site in Gold Bar possible. Retirement was very difficult for him and it was ill health that finally separated him from the joy of growing ferns. I miss his inexhaustible work ethic, eclectic love for music, most especially baroque composers, his unique sense of wry humor, but most of all his great joy in anything to do with ferns.

The areas of fern production that have occupied my attention are the knowledgeable selective culture of named Victorian cultivars, new introductions, garden ready xeric ferns, and marginally hardy tree ferns. I am dedicated to growing and evaluating species of cultivars new or little known in commercial production. It is

rewarding to see innumerable ferns that I have grown, tested, evaluated, and then passed onto wholesale fern growers become beloved standards in commercial production .

In mid 1995 I began moving to a new residence and nursery site. Gold Bar is a small town nestled at the base of the Cascade Mountain range northeast of Seattle. The five acre property has a picturesque log house, beautifully cleared grounds with second growth western red cedar, big-leaf maple, Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and assorted under-story shrubby and herbaceous natives. Many of the spruce and hemlock have fantastical exposed root systems that embrace the remnants of old fir and cedar stumps lending an enchanted forest atmosphere.

The main nursery business is local retail, mail-order, and participation in many non-profit botanic garden and plant society sales. I give slide lectures to many groups locally as well as throughout North America.

The Fronderosa Frolic, which first began in 2000, is a festival of rare plants, garden art, artifacts, and scintillating botanical conversation featuring some of the premier specialty nurseries and garden artists in the Pacific Northwest. Valerie Easton, Seattle Times columnist, wrote in 2004 that the Frolic is a "celebration of plants and summer...that has become the horticultural equivalent of Woodstock". It is a small effort to help support small growers and local artists become more visible and remain in business.

Fancy Fronds has been participating in the Northwest Flower and Garden show since its inception.. I will be happy to supply a complete list with many of the garden statements if requested. Vanca Lumsden of ALBE Rustics joined me in 1998 to build and design landscape display gardens. Our landscape displays have become more elaborate and more fun every year. Our display for 2007 was entitled "Beast in the Garden: Marginal Madness" and featured Oaxacan inspired painted animal sculptures in a garden of mixed hardy, sub-tropical, and tropical plants. We were awarded the Founders Cup for most meritorious exhibit. This is the highest honor given at the show and is the second time we have received it. I will be happy to give you a historical perspective of Fancy Fronds displays over the years if you are interested.

In addition to participating in the show as a landscape designer I have also been active in promoting more events at the show for children. The Sprout Stage venue was added as children's interactive play and education area in 2006. The show was still renting the 6th floor and the Sprout Stage was in a quiet corner where it was possible to read stories several times a day to a mixed age group of children. The stage was moved to the new hall in 2007 with a noisier venue so I opted to have a sing-a-long with the children. This did not work well as the majority of the audience could not read although they appeared to enjoy the songs. It seemed that a musical production presented to the audience would be the best way to integrate music with gardening. I wrote all original songs for our first garden musical entitled "Toad's Dilemma". The first musical cast consisted of several adults and three children. Our Sprout Stage Musical for this year was "Garden Buccaneers" which emphasized environmentally friendly gardening ideas and family and pet friendly garden spaces. We were delighted to have professional musicians donate their talents to our productions the last three years. IN 2010 our Sprout Stage musical continued the theme of our display garden "Wormhole: The Board Game" with original songs to familiar tunes in an interactive performance dubbed "Wormhole: the Musical".

