

ASPARAGUS DENSIFLORUS (KUNTH) JESSOP

Liliaceae/Lily Family

Common Names: Asparagus fern, Sprenger's asparagus fern, emerald fern

Synonymy: *Asparagus sprengeri* Regel

Origin: South Africa

Botanical Description: Evergreen perennial herb from a crown of tuberous roots, to 60 cm (2 ft) in height, with stems stiff or spreading-arching to 2 m (6 ft) long. Larger branches usually bearing minute axillary spines. Branchlets (cladophylls) flat, needle-like, light bright green, to 2.5 cm (1 in) long, clustered at branch nodes. Leaves tiny, scale-like, at bases of branchlets. Flowers small, white or pinkish white, and fragrant. Fruit a bright red berry about 8 mm (< 1 in) in diameter; 3 seeds per fruit.

Ecological Significance: Widely planted as a ground cover (Stresau 1986). Escaped from cultivation (Long and Lakela 1971, Wunderlin 1982). Found in large colonies on several scrub sites in Palm Beach County, displacing native ground cover and understory shrubs (Austin *et al.* 1992), and in Dade County, found in 7 local parks (R. Hammer, Miami-Dade County Parks Department, 1997 personal communication). Has escaped as well into tropical hammocks in Palm Beach County, overtopping young native plants such as wild coffee, *Psychotria nervosa* (A. Zahorcak, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1998 personal communication). Naturalized in barrier-island habitats of Sarasota County (K. A. Langeland, University of Florida, personal observation). Also reported from natural areas in Citrus, Lake, and Lee counties (EPPC 1996).

RRR



Fruit, cladophylls

ASPARAGUS FERN

Distribution: Native to South Africa and long cultivated in the United States and elsewhere as a potted plant (Bailey and Bailey 1947, 1976). In Florida, herbarium specimens of naturalized populations recorded from Hillsborough, Manatee, Pinellas, Lee, Polk, and Monroe counties (Wunderlin *et al.* 1995).

Life History: Cold hardy to -1°C (30°F) (Broschat and Meerow 1991). Thrives in any well-drained soil (Stresau 1986). Grows in low to high light conditions, has low nutrient requirements, and tolerates drought (Broschat and Meerow 1991). Also noted as having “good” salt tolerance (Hunt 1977). Propagated by division of tuberous crowns or by seed (Bailey and Bailey 1976). Flowers and fruits through summer and fall (Hunt 1977). Seeds spread by birds (Austin *et al.* 1992).



In scrub habitat, Palm Beach County



Flowers