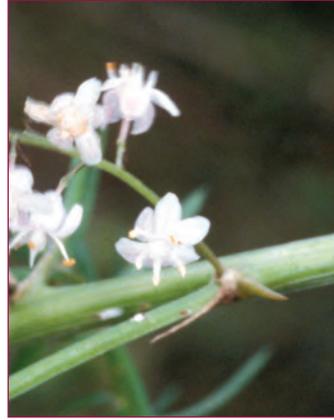


Asparagus aethiopicus L.



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

Synonymy: *A. sprengeri* Regel, *A. densiflorus* (Kunth) Jessop missapplied.

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, needlelike, light to 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 (1/2 inch) 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 found in 7 local parks in Miami-Dade County (R. Hammer, Miami-Dade Parks Department, Castellow Hammock Nature Center, Miami, FL, 1997 pers. comm.). 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 pers. comm.). Naturalized in barrier-island habitats of Sarasota County (K. A. Langeland, University of Florida, personal observation).

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, documented as invading xeric hammocks, scrub, coastal dunes, coastal berms, cabbage palm hammocks, upland mixed forests, and ruderal communities. Herbarium specimens of naturalized populations recorded from 16 Florida counties as far west as Okaloosa County in the Panhandle and as far north as Nassau County, south to Miami-Dade and Monroe counties, including the Keys (Wunderlin and Hansen 2004). Has also been reported from natural areas in Citrus, Lake, Pasco, Sarasota, and Martin counties (FLEPPC 2005).

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).