

WELCOME TO THE STUMPERY!

A creation by the Hardy Fern Foundation, 2009.

A stumpery is an intentional arrangement of woody material like trunks and root wads. A root wad is a length of downed tree that includes a portion of the trunk and, most importantly, the root mass or ball. The goal of a stumpery is the creation of habitat especially for ferns; secondarily comes the sense of accomplishment from arrangements that display the arresting architecture of the roots, or any other things that you can find on or in re-purposed wood.

At first sight, a stumpery might stop you in your tracks--it's definitely odd-looking in the traditional landscape. But the structure is important beyond its immediate shock value. It's efficient for growing ferns because of its vertical use of space. The unique topography of the piles makes dozens of pockets with conditions suitable for ferns with very different needs. Deep shade? Wet soil? Epiphytic? Fast-draining soil? Full sun? Not normally found near each other, here within a few feet it's possible to study a sun-tolerant fern, a moisture lover, a drought-tolerant, a shade lover. The slow breakdown of the wood returns useful compounds back to the soil. It provides suitable environments for the succession of insects and small mammals that will live in and on the wood, and in the soil immediately beneath it. Look for tell-tale piles of Doug fir cone scales below perfect

perching places. They're evidence of our native Douglas squirrel, who efficiently strips cones apart to get at their rich proteins. Voles? Look for bedraggled frond bits protruding from tiny burrows near stumps. These are mute testimony to the labors of these little creatures who are making soft liners for their chambers.

The first known stumpery was in 1856. It was the brainstorm of Edward William Cooke, an artist and gardener. At that time, land clearing left large debris piles that begged a solution. Cooke looked at them and saw something different. At Biddulph Grange, the estate of James Batemen, he turned some of the chaotic piles into ten-foot tall walls on either side of a path, and planted them out in ferns. The structure was quickly repeated across Britain, ready for the new species the fern-crazed Victorians were discovering.

At present, stumperies are enjoying a resurgence. Prince Charles created a private one at Highgrove House in 1980, using sweet chestnut roots. The Hardy Fern Foundation stumpery is constructed primarily with Doug fir, holding over 140 pieces of wood, and is the largest public stumpery in the world. So come on in and acquaint yourself with this horticultural concept, and see ferns in new places!

A Brief History of the Hardy Fern Foundation

1989

- HFF created by over-caffeinated fern enthusiasts.

1990

- RSF chosen as primary test site, and original fern plantings are installed.
- First newsletter published.
- First spore list distributed.
- Role of hosting annual Fern Fest assumed.

1991- present

- Satellite and display garden program established. Now known as affiliate gardens, the number of participating gardens continues to grow as we use them for hardiness and performance evaluations.
- Satellite garden and member plant distributions begin.
- Newsletter expands to quarterly format.

1992 -present

- Annual Northwest Flower & Garden Show education booth.
- National and international fern tours co-sponsored with British Pteridological Society.
- Local garden tours and hikes offered.

2009

- Stumpery is established.