

Ferns and Lycophytes

Lycophyte:

- small, single-veined leaves (not fronds)
- spores found in leaf axils

Fern:

- most have branching-veined leaves called fronds

Frond:

- the 'leafy' part of the fern we see as we wander through the woods
- consists of the *stipe* (leaf stalk) and the *blade* (leafy expanded portion of the frond)

Rhizomes:

- similar to the 'stems' of flowering plants
- fronds extend from the rhizome, which is often times partially or entirely underground

Sporangia:

- reproductive structures of ferns and lycophytes
- miniature capsules that produce dust-like spores
- in ferns, often located on the underside of the fronds, in separate fronds, or parts of fronds
- in lycophytes, found on the axils or base of their tiny leaves

Spores:

- dust-like 'seeds' of ferns and lycophytes
- contained in the sporangia
- millions are dropped in a fern's lifetime, but only a few ever land in a spot that has enough moisture and light to produce growth



Special thanks to J. Montgomery for his knowledge and expertise used in the completion of this checklist.

Rev. 03/2014

For more information

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Guide to Ferns and Lycophytes



Climbing Fern (*Lygodium palmatum*)

Climbing, or Hartford Fern, was listed as a Pennsylvania Endangered plant until just recently. It can be found in abundance within the park.

LYOPHYTES		
CLUB MOSSES		S
Shining Fir-moss <i>(Huperzia lucidula)</i>		R
Bristly Clubmoss, Stiff Clubmoss <i>(Lycopodium annotinum)</i>		I
Common Clubmoss, Staghorn Clubmoss, Wolf's Claw Clubmoss <i>(Lycopodium clavatum var. clavatum)</i>		C
Flat-branch Clubmoss <i>(Lycopodium digitatum)</i>		C
Hickey's Ground-pine <i>(Lycopodium hickeyi)</i>		I
Flat-branched Ground-pine <i>(Lycopodium obscurum)</i>		C
QUILLWORTS		
Engelmann's Quillwort <i>(Isoetes engelmannii)</i>		I
Shore Quillwort, Riverbank Quillwort <i>(Isoetes riparia)</i>		R
FERNS		
SUCCULENT FERNS		
Cut-leaved Grape Fern <i>(Botrychium dissectum)</i>		I
Rattlesnake Fern <i>(Botrychium virginianum)</i>		I
HORSETAILS		
Field Horsetail <i>(Equisetum arvense)</i>		I
Woodland Horsetail <i>(Equisetum sylvaticum)</i>		R
PRIMITIVE FERNS		
Climbing Fern <i>(Lygodium palmatum)</i>		C
Cinnamon Fern <i>(Osmunda cinnamomea)</i>		C
Interrupted Fern <i>(Osmunda claytoniana)</i>		C
Royal Fern <i>(Osmunda regalis var. spectabilis)</i>		I

If you are interested in choosing a field guide to help in the identification of ferns and lycophytes, please inquire in the park office.

TRUE FERNS		S
Maidenhair Fern <i>(Adiantum pedatum)</i>		I
Ebony Spleenwort <i>(Asplenium platyneuron)</i>		C
Maidenhair Spleenwort <i>(Asplenium trichomanes)</i>		R
Lady Fern, Northeast Lady Fern <i>(Athyrium filix-femina var. angustum)</i>		A
Fragile Fern, Brittle Fern <i>(Cystopteris tenuis)</i>		I
Hay-scented Fern, Boulder Fern <i>(Dennstaedtia punctilobula)</i>		A
Silvery Glade Fern <i>(Deparia acrostichoides)</i>		I
Spinulose Wood Fern <i>(Dryopteris carthusiana)</i>		C
Crested Shield Fern, Crested Fern <i>(Dryopteris cristata)</i>		I
Evergreen Wood Fern <i>(Dryopteris intermedia)</i>		C
Marginal Wood Fern, Leatherleaf Wood Fern <i>(Dryopteris marginalis)</i>		C
Boot's Wood Fern * <i>Dryopteris</i> hybrid <i>(Dryopteris X bootii)</i>		R
Triploid Wood Fern * <i>Dryopteris</i> hybrid <i>(Dryopteris X triploidea)</i>		R
Sensitive Fern, Bead Fern <i>(Onoclea sensibilis)</i>		A
Long Beech Fern, Narrow Beech Fern <i>(Phegopteris connectilis)</i>		I
Broad Beech Fern <i>(Phegopteris hexagonoptera)</i>		R
Appalachian Polypody <i>(Polypodium appalachianum)</i>		I
Rock-cap, Common Polypody <i>(Polypodium virginianum)</i>		I
Christmas Fern <i>(Polystichum acrostichoides)</i>		C
Northern Bracken Fern <i>(Pteridium aquilinum var. latiusculum)</i>		A
New York Fern <i>(Thelypteris noveboracensis)</i>		C
Marsh Fern <i>(Thelypteris palustris var. pubescens)</i>		C

LEGEND	
S – RELATIVE ABUNDANCE AND STATUS:	
A – <i>abundant</i> ; widespread, species should be found in nearly all suitable habitats	
C – <i>common</i> ; species found in many suitable habitats	
I – <i>infrequent</i> ; found in a few suitable habitats	
R – <i>rare</i> ; of limited distribution, only a few individuals or stands present	

Please remember:

Picking leaves or plants is prohibited. Ferns are important ground cover in the forest and help keep moisture in the ground and soil in place.



Did you know...

- newly emerging ferns are called 'fiddleheads' due to the unfurled frond's resemblance to the top of a fiddle
- Christmas Fern is easily identified; it stays green year round and the fronds have leaflets shaped like Christmas stockings
- fossil relatives of the modern horsetails and Lycophytes make up much of the coal mined in Pennsylvania
- although the leaves appear fern-like, the plant known as Sweet Fern (*Comptonia peregrina*) isn't a fern at all; it is a woody shrub