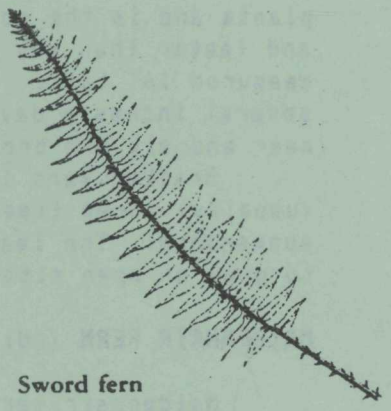
FERNS OF THE HOH

The group of plants we call ferns inhabited the earth long before seed plants came to dominate. Ferns don't have flowers or fruit; instead they produce spores. The spores of most ferns show up as dark spots on the back of each leaf. The spores rub off the leaf and blow in the wind. Where they land, a small, fertile growth forms, and this growth produces the fertile cells that will create the fern as we see it.

The word "leaf" refers to the whole frond of the fern. The leaflets growing out of either side of the frond are called "pinnae". The "stalk" is the central portion of the fern from which everything else grows.

SWORD FERN (Polystichum munitum)

The sword fern is probably the most abundant fern on the nature trails here at the Hoh. In the winter, elk eat the tips of many of its leaves. Outside the park, it is a favorite fern of florists. Sword fern is evergreen, with thick, coarse leaves. Each pinna has saw-toothed edges, and is asymmetrical at the base. (supposedly like the hilt of a sword, which is how the plant got its name.) Sword fern prefers to grow in moist, cool, and shady spots, and in some places is waist-high.

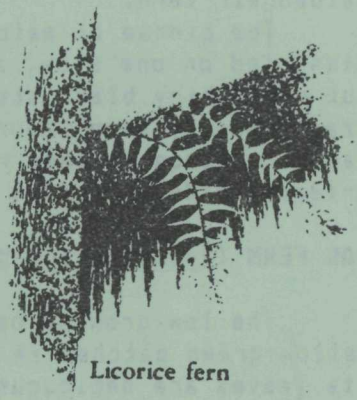


Sword fern

LICORICE FERN (Polypodium glycyrrhiza)

Licorice fern grows on rocks, logs and trees such as maples and alders. It is most often found growing in mossy places because the mosses keep the fern roots moist. Licorice ferns are epiphytes, or plants growing upon other plants.

Licorice fern leaves are smooth and dark. The pinnae are wider at the base than at the tip, and are not separated all the way to the stalk. The leaves are 4" to 32" tall and they sometimes curl and dry up in summer when the mosses become dormant. Despite the drying, they are considered evergreen.

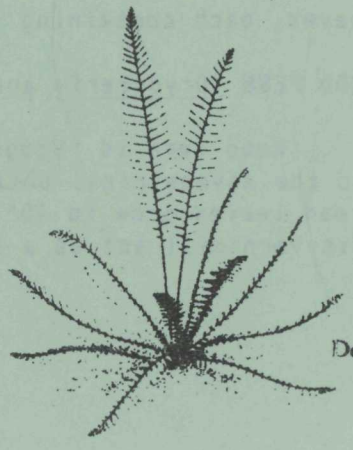


Licorice fern

DEER FERN (Blechnam spicant)

Deer fern is an important food source for elk and deer in the winter. It is the only northern species of a genus containing mostly tropical plants.

Deer fern is distinctive because it has two types of fronds. The fertile fronds are the taller of the two, and grow out of the center of each clump. The fertile fronds have thin, widely separated pinnae which somewhat resemble the skeleton of a fish. The fertile fronds dry out by autumn. The evergreen sterile leaves are shorter

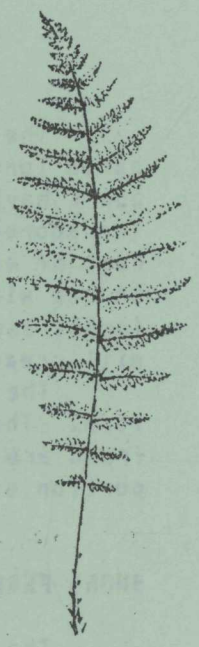


Deer fern

and thicker, and surround the fertile ones.

LADY FERN (Athyrium filix-femina)

Lady fern leaves are 16" to 80" tall, and deciduous. They are lacy in appearance, like those of the bracken fern. However, lady fern leaves narrow at both ends, and bracken leaves do not. The Latin name means fern-woman, and the roots have a long history of use in herbal medicines.



Lady fern

BRACKEN FERN (Pteridium aquilinum)

Bracken fern is one of the world's most abundant plants and is the most widespread fern. It grows taller and faster than any other fern. One sample in Washington measured 16' tall. Bracken fern has been known to grow several inches a day. It is also toxic, and will poison deer and elk who browse too heavily on its foliage.

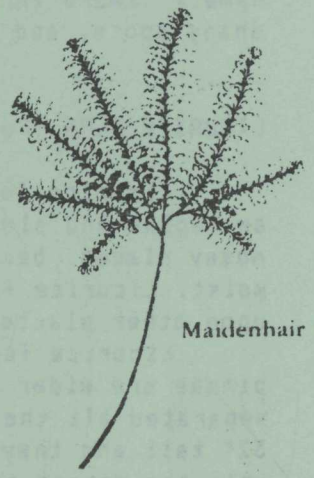
Bracken fern leaves are 24" to 80" tall and two or (usually) three times compound which gives them a lacy appearance. The leaves are deciduous. Bracken prefers to grow on open sites.

Bracken fern

MAIDENHAIR FERN (Adiantum pedatum)

Maidenhair fern is named for its roots, which have fine, dark hairs. It prefers wet soils and rocky places, so a streambank would be a good place to look for maidenhair fern.

The pinnae of maidenhair fern are fan-shaped, dissected on one side, and smooth on the other. They grow out of a shiny black stalk. The stalks have traditionally been important in Makah and Quinault basketry, because they retain their dark color even when dried. Maidenhair is a deciduous fern.



Maidenhair fern

OAK FERN (Gymnocarpium dryopteris)

The low growing oak fern often grows in large, yellow-green patches in moist woods and rocky places. Its leaves are deciduous and delicate in appearance. Each frond is made up of three similar triangular leaves, each containing finely dissected pinnae.

Oak fern

WOOD FERN (Dryopteris austricaca)

Wood fern is recognized by the scales on the stem, and the asymmetrical bottom pair of pinnae. The dark green leaves grow to 40" and form large upright plants. This fern will act as a laxative if eaten.

Spreading wood fern

5/9.