

How to know some of the Common Ferns of Central Florida

by Edith Bettinger

Ferns described:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Cinnamon fern | 8. Blechnum fern |
| 2. Virginia chain fern | 9. Sword ferns: |
| | a. wild Boston fern |
| 3. The shield ferns: | b. giant sword fern |
| a. swamp | |
| b. downy | 10. Epiphytes: |
| c. normal | a. strap fern |
| d. marsh | b. resurrection fern |
| e. southern | c. shoestring fern |
| 4. Bramble fern | d. golden polypody |
| 5. Bracken fern | |
| 6. Royal fern | |
| 7. Netted chain fern | |

Ferns are easier to identify if the brown spore dots are present on the underside of the blade. Spore-bearing (fertile) segments or fronds are illustrated separately if they are distinctly different from non-spore-bearing (sterile) segments or fronds.

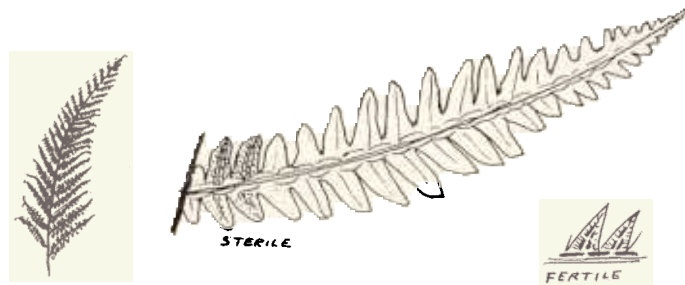
Most ferns have a distinguishing vein pattern, but this may be difficult to perceive without a hand lens.



1. Cinnamon Fern, *Osmunda cinnamomea*

FronDS to 5 ft., smooth surfaces, stems mostly straw-colored. Segments of sterile fronds about twice as long as wide, separated most of the way down. Forked veins. Tiny woolly tuft on underside where leaflet joins stem.

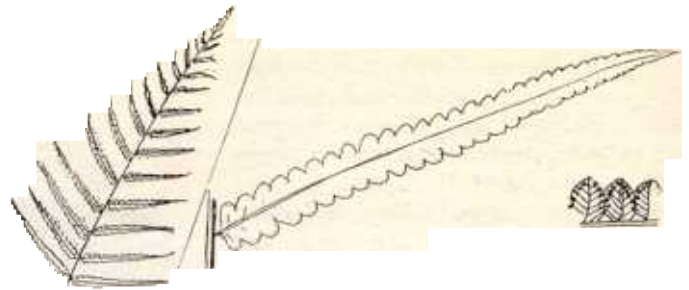
Spores only on occasional, short-lived, upright, cinnamon-colored fertile fronds.



2. Virginia Chain Fern, *Woodwardia virginica*

FronDS to 5 ft., smooth-surfaced, stems dark brown. Leaflets up to slightly more than 1 in. wide, very deeply cut. Segments 3 or 4 times longer than wide.

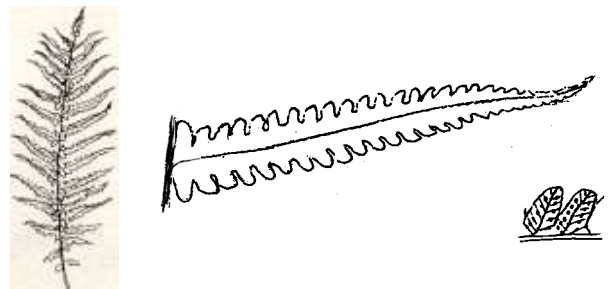
Very distinctive "chain" vein pattern. Spores line up along segment and leaflet midribs.



3a. Swamp Shield Fern, *Thelypteris interrupta* (alt. *T. totta*)

Mature stem light-colored, leaflets crisp, lustrous, to 1/2 in. wide, margins down-curved. Segments less than twice as long as wide, cut less than half way down.

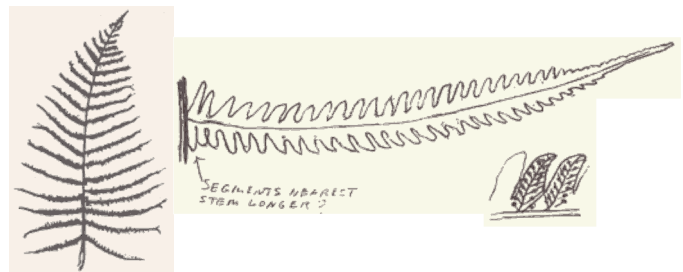
Spore dots in distinctive winding rows near margins. Veins straight, unbranched, lowest pair united.



3b. Downy Shield Fern, *T. dentata*

All surfaces downy, mature fronds dark green with dark stems, mature leaflets about 3/4 in. wide. Lowest leaflets shortened, wider spaced, down-pointing. Segments separated about half way, those nearest stem usually longer. Lowest veins joined.

About 6 pairs of spore dots.



3c. Normal Shield Fern, *P. kunthii*

Similar to the Downy Shield Fern, but more variable. Stems mostly straw-colored, blade slightly or not reduced at base.

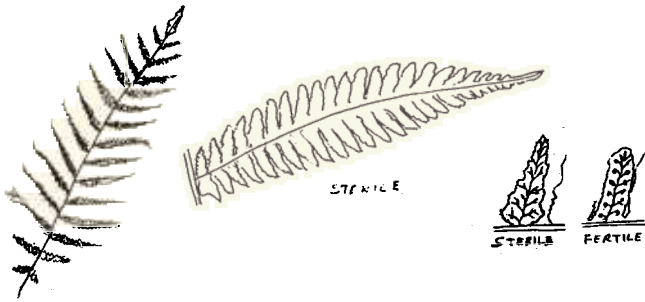
Leaflets usually less than 3/4 in. wide, segments cut more than half way down, lowest veins not joined.



3d. Marsh Fern, *T. palustris*

FronDS usually less than 2 ft., delicate, fine cut, light green. Mature stem dark, thin. On fertile fronds, margins turn under.

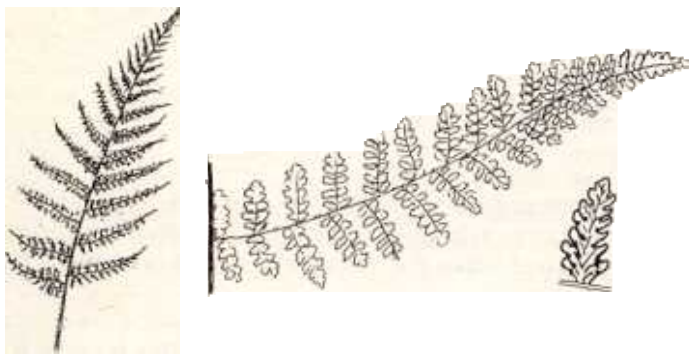
Illustrations, for most of the ferns described, include a blade silhouette, a sketch of the leaflet (pinna), and a sketch of a segment (pinnule) showing vein pattern and spore distribution. Drawings are by Edith Bettinger.



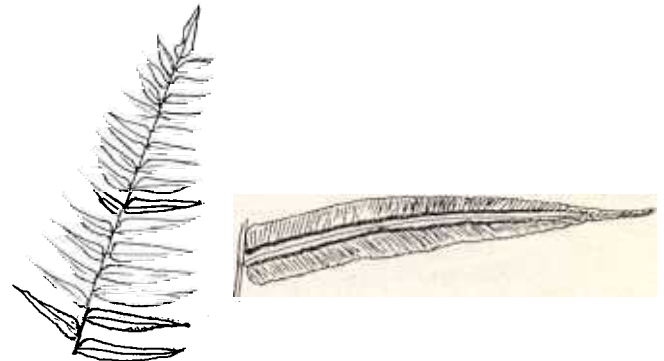
3e. Southern Shield Fern, *Dryopteris ludoviciana*
Blade tapered at base, lustrous, leathery, dark green. Fertile leaflets (when present) all toward stem tip, their segments smaller, rectangular. Segments of sterile leaflets somewhat triangular, with many-branched veins and scalloped edges.



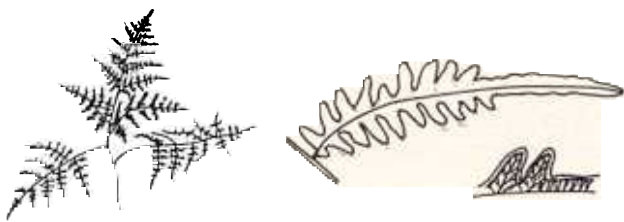
7. Netted Chain Fern, *Woodwardia areolata*
Fronds to 2 ft. by 8 in. All veins netted. When present, spores borne on slender, upright, fertile fronds.



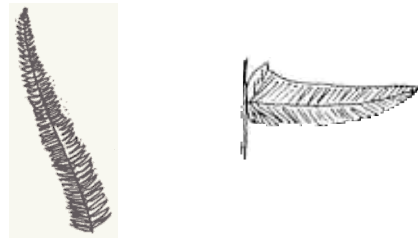
4. Flakelet, or Bramble Fern, *Hypolepis repens*
Long, sprawling stems with small prickles. Stem dark, very finely cut.



8. Blechnum Fern, *Blechnum serrulatum*
Fronds to 5 ft., smooth, dark green, finely serrated edges. Spores, when present, form solid row along each side of segment midrib.



5. Bracken Fern, *Pteridium aquilinum*
Branched fronds, blades often horizontal, stem color light. Generally found in drier soil than other ferns. Easy to identify by elongated terminal segments.
Spores in thin line beneath rolled-under margin. Veins branched.



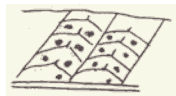
9. Wild Boston Fern, *Nephrolepis exaltata*
Narrow blade to 3 ft., leaflets thin, light green, slightly curved upward. Base of leaflet forms distinct auricle (ear) on upper side. Veins forked, upper branches may end in small spore dot. Grows in soil or trees (especially cabbage palms).



6. Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis*
Up to 6 ft., fronds branched, segments to about 1¼ in. long. Spores clustered densely on special leaflets at frond tip.



9a. Giant Sword Fern, *Nephrolepis biserrata*
Trailing fronds, 3 to 7 ft., smooth surface. Leaflet longer than Wild Boston Fern and lacks the conspicuous auricle.



10. Strap Fern, *Polypodium phyllitidis* (alt. *Campyloneuron phyllitidis*)

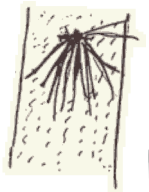
Usually epiphytic, often growing on tree bases. Fronds are leather, undivided, about 2 ft. by 2 in. Netted veins. Spore dots neatly spaced over the lower surface.



10b. Resurrection Fern, *Polypodium polypodioides*

Blade triangular, about 4 in. by 2 in., cut into about ten or more pairs of 1/4 in. segments. Distinctive red-brown scales under surface. Coils as though dead when dry, forms dense mats on horizontal limbs of old oaks.

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10c. Shoestring Fern, *Vittaria lineata*

Thin drooping fronds cascade down from tree trunks, suggesting a thick clump of fine grass. Spores in long grooves on underside.



10d. Golden polypody, *Phlebodium aureum*

Fronds to 2 ft., coarse, leathery. Epiphyte, often seen on cabbage palm leaf bases. Frond resembles that of Netted Chain Fern.

Netted veins. Because of hairy, creeping, rust-colored rhizome, sometimes called Serpent, or Rabbit's Foot, Fern.