

# IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO OUR MOST COMMON FERNS



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## The Top Ten

- 1) Interrupted Fern
- 2) Cinnamon Fern
- 3) Sensitive Fern
- 4) Marginal Wood Fern
- 5) Evergreen Wood Fern
- 6) Christmas Fern
- 7) Lady Fern
- 8) New York Fern
- 9) Hay-scented Fern
- 10) Bracken Fern (and/or Common Polypody)



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# 1

## Location

- common roadside species
- woods, fields
- moderately dry to moist
- sun or shade
- generalist



## Additional Diagnostics

- U-shaped vascular bundles
- lacks wooly tufts
- sub-leaflets usually overlap

## Search Image

- symmetric clump
- large, twice-cut leaves to 30"
- **Dimorphic fertile leaf with distinct interruptions**



# Interrupted Fern

*Osmunda claytoniana*





## 2

### Location

- roadsides and ditches
- moist woods, fields, swamps, bogs
- wetland indicator status FACW

### Search Image

- symmetric clump
- large, twice-cut leaves to 30"
- **dimorphic cinnamon-colored fertile fronds**
- stipe covered with cinnamon-brown hair



## Cinnamon Fern

*Osmundastrum cinnamomea*



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### Additional Diagnostics

- U-shaped vascular bundles
- **wooly cinnamon tufts in leaflet axils**
- leaflets with long pointed tips
- sub-leaflets not overlapping



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# 3 Sensitive Fern

## *Onoclea sensibilis*

### Location

- open or forested wetlands
- swamps, marshes, wet meadows
- sun or shade
- roadside ditches
- wetland indicator status FACW

### Search Image

- clusters of single stems 12"-24"+
- once-cut\* leaves with wavy edges
- yellow-green color
- **dimorphic fertile frond a persistent and bead-like spike**

### Additional Diagnostics

- net-like veins
- upper pinnae with wings along rachis
- lower pair widely spaced
- stem mostly smooth, stiff, and brittle





# 4 Marginal Wood Fern

*Dryopteris marginalis*

## Location

- woods and roadsides
- often on stone walls, outcrops
- moderate moisture

## Search Image

- symmetric clump
- twice-cut leaves to 24" fertile and sterile the same
- leathery, dark green foliage
- very scaly

## Additional Diagnostics

- multiple round vascular bundles
- **fruitdots marginal**
- **evergreen**





# Evergreen Wood Fern

*Dryopteris intermedia*

## Location

- woods and roadsides
- often on stone walls
- moderate moisture
- generalist



## Search Image

- symmetric clump
- thrice-cut leaves to 24"
- fertile and sterile the same
- lacy foliage
- stipe very scaly

## Additional Diagnostics

- multiple round vascular bundles
- **fruitdots central**
- **evergreen**



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# 6

## Christmas Fern

*Polystichum acrostichoides*

### Location

- generalist
- woods, roadsides, rocky slopes
- dry to moist
- semi-shade to shade

### Search Image

- dark green asymmetric clump
- once-cut leaves 12+", lustrous
- leaflets eared, finely toothed and bristle tipped, often twisted
- **Dimorphic fertile leaves narrow tipped**



### Additional Diagnostics

- evergreen
- dense light-brown scales
- fiddlehead a silvery nautilus





# 7

## Location

- woods and roadsides, ditches
- moderate moisture
- generalist

## Search Image

- asymmetric clumps in masses
- thrice-cut leaves to 30" not dimorphic
- lacy foliage, translucent stems
- **scales look like ground black pepper**

## Additional Diagnostics

- fruitdots curved, in herringbone pattern
- apostrophe-shaped vascular bundles
- ruby red color phase



# Lady Fern

*Athyrium filix-femina*





# 8

## New York Fern

### *Parathelypteris noveboracensis*

#### Location

- open woods or in sunny gaps
- banks and edges of roads
- common mid-slope species

#### Search Image

- colonies of three or more leaves to a tuft
- twice-cut leaves, 8"-20"; delicate
- **blade tapering top and bottom**

#### Additional Diagnostics

- stem slightly hairy above; few scales below
- fruitdots round with kidney shaped indusium
- fertile fronds slightly narrower, more erect





# 9

## Location

- dry, open woods, fields and roadsides
- disturbed or cleared sites
- thrives in open sun

## Search Image

- masses of single stems
- thrice-cut leaves 12-24" not dimorphic
- leaves yellowish green
- covered with fine glandular hairs
- leaf tips relaxed (bent) like hemlock

## Additional Diagnostics

- **straw colored stipe with dark, brittle base**
- **sticky feel from glandular hairs**
- cup-shaped indusia
- vascular bundles a smiley face



# Hay-scented Fern

## *Dennstaedtia punctilobula*





# 10

## Bracken Fern

*Pteridium aquilinum*

### Location

- dry, sandy, open fields or woods
- disturbed sites
- roadside banks
- neutral-acid
- world-wide distribution

### Search Image

- **large fronds 3'-4'+ tall** not dimorphic, but **fertile leaves rare**
- distinctive **three part triangular blade**
- thrice-cut but coarse in texture
- pinnae with narrow uncut tips

### Additional Diagnostics

- stipe smooth, woody, purple-brown at base
- straw-colored above
- multiple irregularly shaped vascular bundles
- large, deeply buried rhizome
- sori continuous along margin, not common





# 11 Common Polypody

*Polypodium virginianum*

## Location

- top of boulders, rocky slopes
- often very dry locations
- sun to shade

## Search Image

- masses of individual stems, 6"+
- once-cut leaves, broadest in middle
- leaflets with rounded tips, entire and not eared

## Additional Diagnostics

- fertile, non-fertile leaflets similar
- evergreen
- sparse light-brown scales
- large round fruitdots, no indusium





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Marsh fern, rail trail, Amherst MA