

CINNAMON FERN

(*Osmunda cinnamomea*)



A large fern that is similar in appearance to the Interrupted Fern, the Cinnamon Fern prefers damper areas, the banks of streams or ponds, ditches, and marshes. Spore clusters develop in clumps on separate fertile fronds that are bright green at first, but soon turn cinnamon brown. The stalk of the sterile fronds are often covered with soft cinnamon-colored wool.

SENSITIVE FERN

(*Onoclea sensibilis*)



This light-green, rather unfernlike fern has almost triangular fronds and is usually 1'-2' tall. Although spores are produced in hard, beadlike cases on separate stalks. Sensitive Ferns spread more rapidly along roadsides by means of the creeping rootstock. The name comes from the tendency to wither quickly when picked.

INTERRUPTED FERN

(*Osmunda claytoniana*)



The large (up to 6') arching fronds may be "interrupted" in the middle by several pairs of shrivelled, dark brown, fertile leaflets bearing spore cases. These dead-looking leaflets make the Interrupted Fern one of the easiest to identify -- IF the fern is old enough to be fertile! If not, look closely at the lobes on the sterile leaflets -- they are blunter than the more pointed lobes on the closely-related and very similar Cinnamon Fern.

ROYAL FERN

(*Osmunda regalis*)



This large (4'-5' tall) fern looks somewhat like a young locust tree due to the widely spaced, oblong leaflets. It inhabits true wetlands, often growing in several inches of standing water. A fertile frond resembles a sterile frond except for the presence of brown spore cases clustered at the top of the leaf.

COMMON POLYPODY

(*Polypodium vulgare*)



Simple in design and our smallest fern, the Common Polypody seldom grows more than 9" tall. Preferring damp, shady areas, it may be found on stumps or old logs, in dark woods, or on mossy boulders near the rocky shoreline. Fruitdots, when present on the underside of the leaves, are large, rust-colored, and more abundant near the tops of the fronds. The name means "many" (poly) "feet" (pody).

FERNS OF BIG BAY STATE PARK

The often over-looked category of plants we call ferns inhabited the earth long before the flowering plants came to dominate. Once growing over 100 feet tall, tree ferns provided shade for the dinosaurs. Today's ferns, like those of 350 million years ago, have neither flowers nor fruit, but depend upon spores for a more primitive means of reproduction. In most species, spores are produced in dark fruit dots on the underside of the leaves. In some ferns, however, sporangia may instead be found clustered in the middle or at the top of fertile fronds, or on separate stalks altogether. Ferns may also spread by means of a creeping rootstock.

The ferns described in this brochure are those most commonly found in Big Bay State Park. They represent only a handful of the thousands of species of ferns that survive today.



Compiled and written by Kristin Lein.

BRACKEN FERN (*Pteridium aquilinum*)



This is our most common fern, and one of the world's most abundant plants. Broadly triangular and usually 2'-3' tall, the frond tilts horizontally atop a tall, smooth stalk. Spores are produced along the leaf margins and are covered by the reflexed edges of the leaflets. Bracken spreads quickly by means of its rootstock, growing in woods or open fields with poor soil and limited moisture. It is toxic and will poison deer who browse too heavily on its foliage. Late summer is announced by the early withering of the Brackens.

OAK FERN (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*)



Oak Ferns look a little like tiny, delicate, light green Bracken Ferns, but seldom grow over 10" tall. The broadly triangular leaves are divided into three distinct parts and tilt horizontally. Rarely found growing individually, numerous Oak Ferns may carpet the floor of a cool, damp, shady woodland.

LADY FERN (*Athyrium Filix-femina*)



A very common lacy-cut fern about 30" tall, the Lady Fern tolerates partial to full sun in moist areas. The simplest way to distinguish it from a Woodfern is by the few, black, hairlike scales on the stalk of the Lady Fern. The Latin name means "fern-woman," and the roots have a long history of use in herbal medicines.

LONG BEECH FERN (*Thelypteris phegopteris*)



Long Beech fronds are generally triangular, but the bottom pair of leaflets characteristically droop downward and outward. Usually less than 12" tall, this small fern loves shady woods and damp stream banks. Spores develop on the underside of the leaves.

SPINULOSE WOODFERN (*Dryopteris spinulosa*)



These lacy-cut, evergreen ferns are easily confused with Lady Ferns. Woodferns, however, tend to be narrower, more ladder-like in appearance, and have large, pale-brown scales covering the stalks. They grow to be over 30" tall. Spores develop on the underside of the fertile fronds.

OSTRICH FERN (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)



Growing up to 5' tall, this fern was named for its magnificent fronds that are reminiscent of graceful ostrich plumes. The fronds are broadest at the top and gradually taper all the way to the base. Spores are produced on separate stiff fronds that are green when young, but turn dark brown with age. Ostrich Ferns may be found in damp ditches and along streams.