

KEY TO THE COMMON FERNS OF MARYLAND

Prepared by Dwight Johnson, September 2014

I. Broadest at Base (Broadly Triangular in Shape)

- Once cut with wavy pinnae.....**Sensitive Fern**
- Twice cut with wiry stipe.....**Broad Beech Fern**
- Thrice cut
 - i. Large, coarse; usually more than one plant in area; not lacy.....**Bracken Fern**
 - ii. Small and growing singly or in a small group; delicate and lacy
 - A. Fertile stalk arising from center of plant; on lowest pinna, the pinnule closest to the stipe is shorter than the second pinnule.....**Rattlesnake Fern**
 - B. Fertile stalk arising from base of plant; on lowest pinna, the pinnule closest to the stipe is longer than the second pinnule.....**Cut Leaf Grape Fern**

II. Fully Tapering to the Base

- Once cut
 - Small-medium size; very narrow frond; pinnae oblong with “boot” similar to Christmas fern; stipe smooth and dark.....**Ebony Spleenwort**
- Twice cut
 - i. Large and growing in a definite crown; fertile frond (if present) in center, found more often in gardens.....**Ostrich Fern**
 - ii. Medium size, and growing zig-zag over an area, not in crowns.....**New York Fern**

III. Semi-tapering to the base (Lanced Shaped)

- Once cut
 - i. Pinnae two inches or less
 - A. Boot-shaped pinnae attached by a short stalk;**Christmas Fern**
 - B. Pinnae with no stalk; usually growing on top of rocks.....**Common Polypody**
 - ii. Pinnae over two inches long, wavy (resembles Sensitive Fern), found in moist areas east of I-95**Netted Chain Fern**
- Twice Cut
 - i. Stipe with brown scales; sori on edge of pinnule.....**Marginal Wood Fern**
 - ii. Stipe smooth or slightly hairy
 - A. Large size; woolly tufts at bases (axes) of pinnae.....**Cinnamon Fern**
 - B. No tufts at axes
 - 1. Large size; some pinnae apparently missing from middle of fertile fronds (if present); veins in pinnule forked.....**Interrupted Fern**
 - 2. Sori and pinnule venation in herringbone pattern; 2 lowest pinnae pointing outward in a V shape.....**Silvery Glade Fern**
 - 3. Growing zigzag in patches near wet areas; common east of I-95.....**Marsh Fern**
 - 4. Large and shrubby; leaf-like pinnules with short stems.....**Royal Fern**
- Thrice Cut
 - i. Stipe with brown scales
 - A. On lowest pinna, the pinnule closest to the stipe is clearly longer than the second pinnule.....**Spinulose Wood Fern**
 - B. On lowest pinna, the pinnule closest to the stipe is about the same length or shorter than the second pinnule.....**Intermediate Wood Fern**
 - ii. Stipe smooth
 - A. Growing in a clump; sori slightly curved and in herringbone pattern; rachis smooth, not hairy.....**Lady Fern**
 - B. Growing zig-zag over area; hairy rachis; sori small and round.....**Hayscented Fern**
 - C. Pinnules lobed (leaf-like); stipe long and slender.....**Fragile Fern**
 - iii. Stipe and rachis hairy, pinnules lobed; lower pinnules rounded, small fern found growing in rocks.....**Blunt-lobed Woodsia**

IV. Unique Shaped Fern

- Circular-shaped fronds with pinnae on outer rim of stalk; dark wiry stipe.....**Maidenhair Fern**