

The cover features a close-up photograph of a fern frond with a magnifying glass held over it. The magnifying glass is positioned over the sori (clusters of sporangia) on the underside of the frond. The text 'RHODE ISLAND FERNS' is written in a stylized, green, serif font, with 'RHODE ISLAND' arched across the top and 'FERNS' written vertically on the right side. The background is a soft-focus green fern frond.

**RHODE ISLAND
FERNS**

FRAN UNDERWOOD

KATHY BARTON

DON LUBIN

2011

Rhode Island Ferns

— an article about the ferns found in RI. —



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Introduction

WILLIAM W. BAILEY, a 19th century Brown University botanist, described Rhode Island ferns as bewitching plants of very various habitats waving their broad plumes in the swamps or nestling under walls. He wrote of the rigid and glossy, evergreen Christmas Fern and the Maidenhair Fern with its polished ebony stems and light graceful sprays. Bailey listed forty species of ferns growing in Rhode Island. Our list is comprised of forty-six species plus six hybrids. Most of these hybrids are produced within the genus *Dryopteris*, Wood Ferns.

Unlike flowering plants, ferns grow from spores, not seeds. Spores may be produced on the undersides of fronds or on separate stalks. When mature, the spores fall to the ground and germinate to produce the gametophyte generation in the life cycle of the fern. The gametophyte, also called prothallus, contains the structures which produce the sperm and the egg. Fertilization of the egg by the sperm results in the production of a sporophyte. This is the generation in the life cycle of the fern which we know as the “adult fern”.

Our ferns range in size from the tiny Least Moonwort (*Botrychium simplex*) which may be as small as one and one-half inches tall to Cinnamon Fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) which can grow up to six feet tall.

Ferns grow in various habitats ranging from woods or swamps to fields and cliffs. Some grow on limestone cliffs, others on granite cliffs. One of our native ferns can climb to the height of twenty feet. One species, a cliff dweller, has evolved the ability to walk down moss-covered rocks by producing new plants at the tips of its fronds. Habitat information for each species is contained in the pages that follow. In addition, the counties in which the ferns grow and the state status are included.

Francis Underwood
May 2011

The information on Rhode Island Ferns come from several sources. The dates for mature spores are based on Seymour's "Flora of New England". The county and status information is from Rick Enser's Rare Plants of RI and, for ferns not on the Rare Plant List, the status is taken from Gil George's Rhode Island Botanical Survey Check List, published in 1999. Francis Underwood provided habitat information and Don Lubin made sure the nomenclature was up-to-date and has added the identification notes.

RI Rare Plant Status (used only in RI)

- SE State Endangered.** Native species in imminent danger of extirpation from Rhode Island. In general, these species have 1 or 2 known or estimated total populations in the state. Plants listed as State Endangered are protected under the provisions of the Rhode Island State Endangered Species Act, Title 20 of the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island.
- ST State Threatened.** Native species which are likely to become State Endangered in the future if current trends in habitat loss or other detrimental factors remain unchanged. In general, these species have 3-5 known or estimated populations and are especially vulnerable to habitat loss.
- SC State Concern.** Native species not considered to be State Endangered or Threatened at the present time, but are listed due to various factors of rarity and/or vulnerability.
- SH State Historical.** Native species which have been documented for Rhode Island during the last 150 years but for which there are no extant populations.

For Plants not on the RI Rare Plant List

C - Common

A - Abundant

F - Frequent

U - Uncommon

O - Occasional

R - Rare



Botanical Name: **Adiantum pedatum**

Common Name: *Maidenhair Fern*

Habitat: Rich woods

Spores can be found: July to September

State Status: **U**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **Providence, Kent, Washington**

Notes from Don Lubin: Unique, delicate frond shape.
Dark wiry stems were used to make baskets.



Photo credits for this page: upper: Gil George; lower: kbarton



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Botanical Name: **Asplenium montanum**

Common Name: *Mountain Spleenwort*

Habitat: Non-calcareous rocks

Spores can be found: 5/25 — 8/18

State Status: **SE**

Number of sites in State: 1

Counties found in: **Providence**

Notes from Don Lubin: Small fern, rare in New England.



spore cases



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Botanical Name:

Asplenium platyneuron

Common Name:

Ebony Spleenwort

Habitat:

Thin soils of rocky slopes

Spores can be found:

7/17 — 10/29

State Status: **A**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Dark stipe and rachis, pinnae eared like Christmas fern.



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Note the small plant growing at the tip of the frond

Botanical Name:

Asplenium rhizophyllum

Common Name:

Walking Fern

Habitat:

Shaded high pH rocks

Spores can be found:

5/13 — 10/1

State Status: **SE**

Number of sites in State: 1

Counties found in: **Providence**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Grows flat on rock surface. New plants grow from frond tips.



Botanical Name: **Asplenium trichomanes**

Common Name: *Maidenhair Spleenwort*

Habitat: Rock crevices and shaded ledges

Spores can be found: 6/13 — 8/20

State Status: **SC**

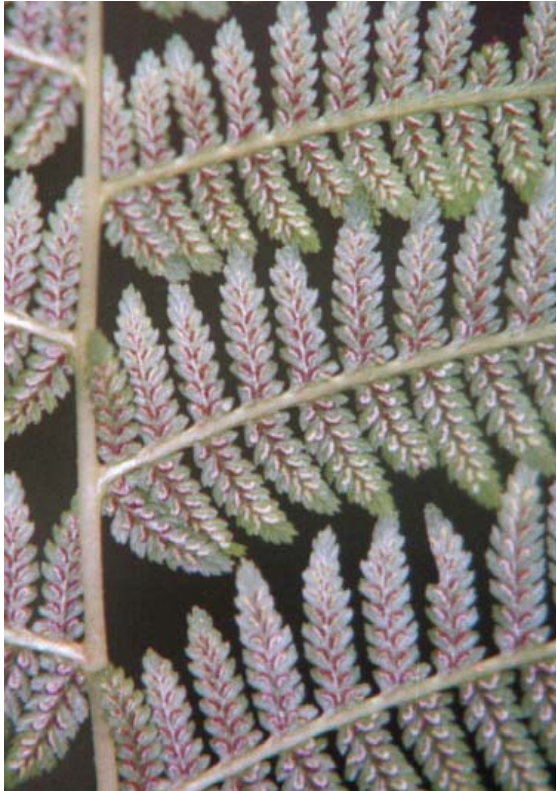
Number of sites in State: 9

Counties found in: **Providence, Kent, Washington**

Notes from Don Lubin: Lovely little fern with dark stipe and rachis.
Pinnae not eared.



Photo credits for this page: top: Don Lubin; bottom: kbarton



Botanical Name:

***Athyrium filix-femina* (L.)
Roth ex Mert.**

Common Name:

Lady Fern

Habitat:

Moist to wet woodlands

Spores can be found:

7/14 — 9/8

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Propagates readily by spores,
grows unbidden in lawns. Curved
sori form herringbone pattern.



Photo credits for this page: upper left: Don Lubin; bottom: ©Francis Underwood 2011

Below: *Botrychium dissectum* f. *obliquum*
Right: *Botrychium dissectum* f. *dissectum*



Botanical Name:

Botrychium dissectum

Common Name:

Cut-leaf Grape Fern

Habitat:

Dry to moist woodlands

Spores can be found:

7/23 — 9/25 (10/2)

State Status: **O**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Degree of cutting highly variable.
Emerges midsummer, changes from
green to bronze in late autumn.





- Botanical Name: **Botrychium lanceolatum**
Common Name: *Narrow Triangle Moonwort*
Habitat: Mesic woodlands
Spores can be found: (6/14) 6/24 — 8/31 (9/17)
- State Status: **SC**
Number of sites in State: 2
Counties found in: **Providence, Kent, Washington**
- Notes from Don Lubin: Wide trophophore projects at right angle,
sporophore branched.



- Botanical Name: **Botrychium matricarifolium**
Common Name: *Daisyleaf Moonwort*
Habitat: Deciduous woodlands and rarely open areas
Spores can be found: (6/13) 6/24 — 8/20
- State Status: **SC**
Number of sites in State: 4
Counties found in: **Providence, Kent, Washington**
- Notes from Don Lubin: Narrow tropophore projects at acute angle,
sporophore unbranched.



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Botanical Name: **Botrychium multifidum**

Common Name: *Leathery Grape Fern*

Habitat: Fields or openings in woodlands

Spores can be found: 7/21 — 9/23

State Status: **R**
Reported found but no sites listed.

Number of sites in State: ?

Counties found in: ?

Notes from Don Lubin: Stipe particularly stout, pinnules overlap, smaller towards frond tips.



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Botanical Name:	Botrychium oneidense
Common Name:	<i>Blunt-lobed Grape Fern</i>
Habitat:	Moist to wet woodlands and swamps
Spores can be found:	7/23 — 9/25 (10/2)
State Status:	SH
Number of sites in State:	0 (1899)
Counties found in:	Providence
Notes from Don Lubin:	Pinnules rounder than <i>B. dissectum</i> . Does not turn bronze in autumn.



Botanical Name:

Botrychium simplex

Common Name:

Least Moonwort

Habitat:

Moist fields and woodlands

Spores can be found:

6/26 — 8/8

State Status: **R**

Number of sites in State : —

Counties found in:

Providence, Kent, Washington

Notes from Don Lubin:

a moonwort, not a grape fern



Photo credits for this page: Steve Matson



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Botanical Name: **Botrychium tenebrosum**

Common Name: *Shade-loving Moonwort*

Habitat: Shaded woodlands

Spores can be found: 6/26 — 8/8

State Status: **R**

Number of sites in State: 1

Counties found in: **Kent (?)**

Notes from Don Lubin:



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Botanical Name:	Botrychium virginianum
Common Name:	<i>Rattlesnake Fern</i>
Habitat:	Rich woodlands
Spores can be found:	6/13 — 8/14
State Status:	O
Number of sites in State:	—
Counties found in:	Providence, Kent, Washington
Notes from Don Lubin:	Largest, most ‘fernlike’ of the Botrychium, with horizontal three-part frond like Bracken. Spore stalk rises from center of frond.



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Botanical Name:	Cystopteris protrusa
Common Name:	<i>Southern Bladder Fern</i>
Habitat:	On rich soil of woodlands
Spores can be found:	6/24 — 9/9
State Status:	Possibly in RI
Number of sites in State:	—
Counties found in:	
Notes from Don Lubin:	Generally grows in soil rather than from rock crevices.



Botanical Name:

Cystopteris tenuis

Common Name:

Fragile Fern

Habitat:

On rocks and sometimes on shaded walls with mortar

Spores can be found: 6/24 — 9/9

State Status: **O**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in:

**Providence, Kent,
Washington, Newport**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Delicate 'airy' blade. Grows only occasionally in soil, more often on rocks.



Botanical Name:

Dennstaedtia punctilobula

Common Name:

Hay-scented Fern

Habitat:

Ubiquitous in fields, rocks and woodlands

Spores can be found:

7/1 — 9/15

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Fronde emerge singly, not in clusters. Note fine white hairs on stipe. Pinnule edges rounded, with no teeth.



Botanical Name:

Deparia acrostichoides

Common Name:

*Silvery Spleenwort or
Silvery Glade Fern*

Habitat:

Rich woodlands

Spores can be found:

7/22 — 9/8 (9/24)

State Status: **F**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in:

**Providence, Kent,
Washington, Newport**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Oblong pinnules of equal length.
Long white hairs on stipe.



Botanical Name:

Dryopteris carthusiana

Common Name:

Spinulose Wood Fern

Habitat:

Wet or dry woodlands

Spores can be found:

6/27 — 10/11

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Turns brown late in fall. Lowest downward pinnule along stipe usually longest.



Botanical Name:

Dryopteris clintoniana

Common Name:

Clinton's Wood Fern

Habitat:

Moist woodlands

Spores can be found:

7/8 — 9/8

State Status: **R**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **Providence**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Larger than *D. cristata*, with longer pinnules less blunt. Fertile pinnae twist less.

Dryopteris clintoniana

continued on next page.

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Dryopteris clintoniana continued from previous page.

Notes from Fran Underwood: Clinton's Wood Fern originated as a naturally occurring hybrid of Crested Wood Fern (*D. cristata*) and Goldie's Fern (*D. goldiana*). Clinton's differs from Crested in a few characteristics; the pinnules are longer and more narrowly triangular than in Crested. Also, at least in the sterile fronds of Clinton's, the blades are more abruptly narrowed at the tip, similar to its Goldie's Fern parent. Both parent ferns have separate fertile and sterile fronds and in both cases, the sterile fronds are evergreen and the fertile fronds are not.



Botanical Name: **Dryopteris cristata**

Common Name: *Crested Wood Fern*

Habitat: Swamps and wetlands

Spores can be found: 7/8 — 9/8

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Narrow fronds, basal pinnae nearly equilateral triangles. Fertile pinnae twist nearly to horizontal.

Dryopteris cristata continued on next page.

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Dryopteris cristata
continued from previous page.

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Botanical Name:	Dryopteris goldiana
Common Name:	<i>Goldie's Wood Fern</i>
Habitat:	Rich woodlands
Spores can be found:	7/8 — October
State Status:	Possibly in RI
Number of sites in State:	—
Counties found in:	
Notes from Don Lubin:	Fronds often tall, with wide pinnae. Frond and pinnae acuminate at apex.



Botanical Name: **Dryopteris intermedia**

Common Name: *Intermediate Wood Fern*

Habitat: Woodlands

Spores can be found: 6/25 — 9/12

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: “Fancy”-cut clustered fern of dry hillsides and rocks. Lowest downward pinnule along stipe generally shorter than adjacent pinnule.



Botanical Name: **Dryopteris marginalis**

Common Name: *Marginal Wood Fern*

Habitat: Rocky woods

Spores can be found: 7/8 — 10/13

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Evergreen fern likes rocks. Stipes very scaly. Pinnule edges untoothed. Sori at very edge of pinnule.

Photo credits for this page: kbarton



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- Botanical Name: **Dryopteris X bootii
(cristata x intermedia)**
- Common Name: *Boot's Wood Fern*
- Habitat: Moist to wet woods
- Spores can be found: 7/2 — 10/11
- State Status: **U**
- Number of sites in State: —
- Counties found in: **Providence, Washington, Bristol**
- Notes from Don Lubin: Basal pinnae not quite so blunt as *D. cristata*, more dissected.



Botanical Name: **Dryopteris X burgessii**
(**clintoniana x marginalis**)
Common Name: *Burgess' Wood Fern*
Habitat: Moist to wet woods and swamps
Spores can be found: 7/8 — 10/13

State Status: **Possibly in RI**
Number of sites in State: —
Counties found in:

Notes from Don Lubin:



Botanical Name: **Dryopteris X slossonae**
(cristata x marginalis)

Common Name: *Slosson's Wood Fern*

Habitat: Moist to wet rocky woods

Spores can be found: July to October

State Status: **R**

Number of sites in State: 2

Counties found in: **Providence, Bristol**

Notes from Don Lubin: Sori not quite at pinnule margin. Basal pinnae not quite so blunt as *D. cristata*. Deformations common.



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Botanical Name: **Dryopteris X triploidea
(carthusiana x intermedia)**

Common Name: *Hybrid Wood Fern*

Habitat: Moist to wet woods and swamps

Spores can be found: 6/26 — 10/17

State Status: **U**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **Bristol, Providence, Washington, Newport**

Notes from Don Lubin: Very common, looks like parents, but often a bit taller.



Botanical Name:

Dryopteris X uliginosa
(carthusiana x cristata)

Common Name:

Marsh Wood Fern

Habitat:

Moist to wet woods and swamps

Spores can be found:

6/26 — 10/17

State Status: **U**

Number of sites in State: 1

Counties found in: Providence

Notes from Don Lubin:



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Botanical Name:	Gymnocarpium dryopteris
Common Name:	<i>Common Oak Fern</i>
Habitat:	Rich woodlands, moss covered wall
Spores can be found:	6/16 — 9/9
State Status:	ST
Number of sites in State:	3
Counties found in:	Providence, Kent
Notes from Don Lubin:	Three-part frond, like small delicate Bracken.



Botanical Name:

Lygodium palmatum

Common Name:

Hartford Climbing Fern

Habitat:

Moist woodlands in swamps
and river floodplains

Spores can be found:

7/22 — 10/3 (11/19)

State Status: **SC**

Number of sites in State: 6

Counties found in:

Providence, Kent, Washington

Notes from Don Lubin:

Palmate pinnae become miniature
at fertile tips. Can climb 20 feet.
Likes sun.



Botanical Name: **Matteuccia struthiopteris**

Common Name: *Ostrich Fern*

Habitat: Rich woods along floodplains also in swamps

Spores can be found: 7/12 — September

State Status: **SC**

Number of sites in State: 5

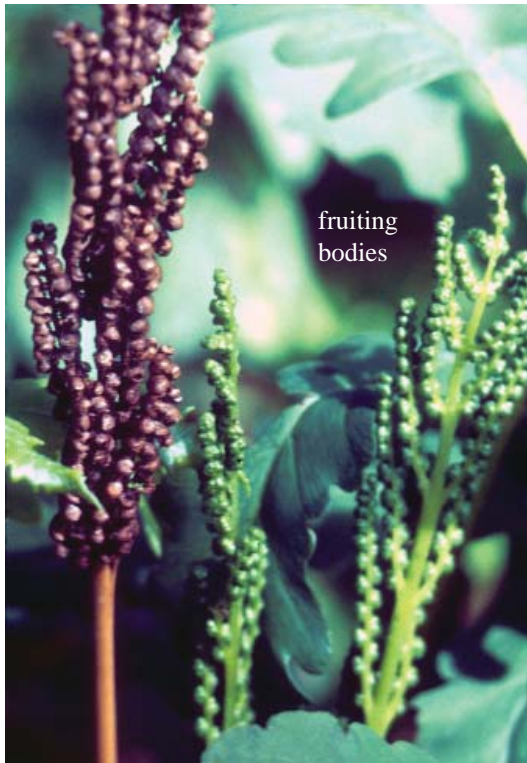
Counties found in: **Providence, Kent**

Notes from Don Lubin: Very erect vase-shaped clusters. Fronds widest near apex. Pinnules tiny down nearly to ground.

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Botanical Name:

Onoclea sensibilis

Common Name:

Sensitive Fern

Habitat:

Marshes, swamps and other
wet areas

Spores can be found:

7/15 — 9/1

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Coarse rounded fronds not cut
entirely to rachis. Sterile fronds
short, like beaded stalks with no
leaf.

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Botanical Name:

Ophioglossum pusillum

Common Name:

Northern Adder's-tongue

Habitat:

Wet fields, meadows, swamps

Spores can be found:

7/4 — 9/15

State Status: **SE**

Number of sites in State: 1

Counties found in: **Washington**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Short, hides in grass. Look for the fertile fronds. Sterile fronds have no midvein.



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Botanical Name:

Osmunda cinnamomea

Common Name:

Cinnamon Fern

Habitat:

Moist to wet woods

Spores can be found:

5/23 — 7/14 (8/13)

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Dramatic fertile fronds generally have no green leaf. Sterile frond and pinna apex acute.

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Botanical Name:

Osmunda claytoniana

Common Name:

Interrupted Fern

Habitat:

Moist to wet woods

Spores can be found:

(5/31) 6/6 — 8/24 (9/7)

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Frond and pinna apex blunt. Fertile plants easily recognized, if you can find any.



spore cases

Botanical Name:

Osmunda regalis

Common Name:

Royal Fern

Habitat:

Wet to mesic soils, swamps
and occasionally in dry fields

Spores can be found:

(5/30) 6/12 — 9/25

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Likes wet feet. Oval pinnae,
looks more like locust than a fern.
Fertile pinnae at frond tips.



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Botanical Name: **Pellaea atropurpurea**
Common Name: *Purple Cliffbrake*
Habitat: Crevices in limestone
Spores can be found: 6/26 — 10/29

State Status: **SE**
Number of sites in State: 1
Counties found in: **Providence**

Notes from Don Lubin: Stipe dark, pinnae or pinnules oval.



41

Botanical Name: **Phegopteris connectilis**

Common Name: *Northern Beech Fern*

Habitat: Moist woods

Spores can be found: 7/9 — 9/27

State Status: **ST**

Number of sites in State: 3

Counties found in: **Providence, Kent**

Notes from Don Lubin: Arrow-shaped fronds often horizontal. First cutting not complete except between first and second pinnae. Likes stream banks and waterfalls.



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Botanical Name: **Phegopteris hexagonoptera**

Common Name: *Broad Beech Fern*

Habitat: Moist woods

Spores can be found: 7/24 — 9/24

State Status: **R**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **Providence, Kent, Washington**

Notes from Don Lubin: Frond shape nearly equilateral triangle. First cutting not complete anywhere. Basal pinnae much more dissected than others.



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Botanical Name:	Polypodium appalachianum
Common Name:	<i>Appalachian Rock Polypody</i>
Habitat:	On rocks or thin soil over rocks
Spores can be found:	4/11 — 11/1
State Status:	R
Number of sites in State:	1
Counties found in:	Providence
Notes from Don Lubin:	Broad triangular evergreen fronds with pointed pinnae.



Botanical Name:

Polypodium appalachianum
X virginianum
(P. X incognitum)

Common Name:

Hybrid Polypody

Habitat:

On rocks or thin soil over rocks

Spores can be found:

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State Status: **R**

Number of sites in State: 1 (1941)

Counties found in: **Providence**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Like parents, perhaps larger, with
aborted white spores (Oct. - Nov.)



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Botanical Name:

Polypodium virginianum

Common Name:

Common Rock Polypody

Habitat:

On rocks or thin soil over rocks

Spores can be found:

4/11 — 11/1

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Narrow bitapering fronds with rounded pinna tips. Thoreau's "cheerful communities".



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- Botanical Name: **Polystichum acrostichoides**
Common Name: *Christmas Fern*
Habitat: Rich soil in woodlands and on rocky hillsides
Spores can be found: 7/2 — 9/2
- State Status: **C**
Number of sites in State: —
Counties found in: **All**
- Notes from Don Lubin: Dark evergreen fern, pinnae with upward “ears” along rachis, fertile pinnae towards tip are smaller.

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Tailed bracken fern
Pteridium aquilinum var. *pseudocaudatum*
Photo by Amy Richard
© 2005 University of Florida

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Botanical Name: **Pteridium aquilinum**
ssp. pseudocaudatum

Common Name: *Clute's Bracken Fern*

Habitat: Dry woodlands and fields

Spores can be found: 7/7 — 9/25

State Status: **Possibly in RI**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: —

Notes from Don Lubin:



Botanical Name: **Pteridium aquilinum v. latiusculum**

Common Name: *Eastern Bracken Fern*

Habitat: Dry woodlands and fields

Spores can be found: 7/7 — 9/25

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Horizontal three-part blade. Fronds emerge singly. Stipe deeply grooved. Seldom fertile.

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Botanical Name:

Thelypteris novoboracensis

Common Name:

New York Fern

Habitat:

Open woodlands

Spores can be found:

7/26 — 9/22

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Bitapering, pinnae nearly to ground, becoming very tiny.



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Botanical Name: **Thelypteris palustris**

Common Name: *Marsh Fern*

Habitat: Woodlands with moist soil, swamps and marshes

Spores can be found: 8/2 — 10/11

State Status: **C**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Blade widest near base, long brown stipe. Veins forked in sterile fronds.



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Botanical Name: **Thelypteris simulata**

Common Name: *Massachusetts Fern*

Habitat: Deciduous woodlands with moist soil

Spores can be found: 8/3 — 9/27 (10/6)

State Status: **O**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Frond shape intermediate between Marsh and New York ferns, with lower pinnae reduced somewhat. Lower pinnae narrow toward rachis.

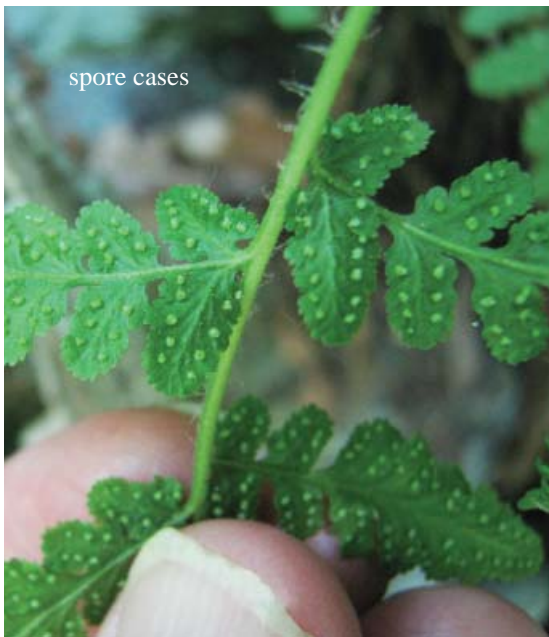


52

Botanical Name: **Woodsia ilvensis**
Common Name: *Rusty Woodsia*
Habitat: Rocky slopes, cliffs and ledges
Spores can be found: (6/18) 7/8 — 10/4

State Status: **SH**
Number of sites in State: 0 (1977)
Counties found in: **Providence**

Notes from Don Lubin: Very scaly small fern



Botanical Name:

Woodsia obtusa

Common Name:

Blunt-lobed Woodsia

Habitat:

On rocks in woodlands in
sun or shade

Spores can be found:

7/16 — 10/29

State Status: **U**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in:

**Providence, Kent,
Washington, Newport**

Notes from Don Lubin:

Stipes quite scaly.



Botanical Name: **Woodwardia areolata**

Common Name: *Netted Chain Fern*

Habitat: Swamps and wet woods

Spores can be found: 7/28 — 10/14

State Status: **U**

Number of sites in State: —

Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Like Sensitive fern, but pinnae edges finely toothed, not scalloped. Tall fertile fronds like sterile, but much narrowed.



Botanical Name: **Woodwardia virginica**

Common Name: *Virginia Chain Fern*

Habitat: Marshes and swamps in shade or sun

Spores can be found: 7/22 — 9/19

State Status: **O**

Number of sites in State: —

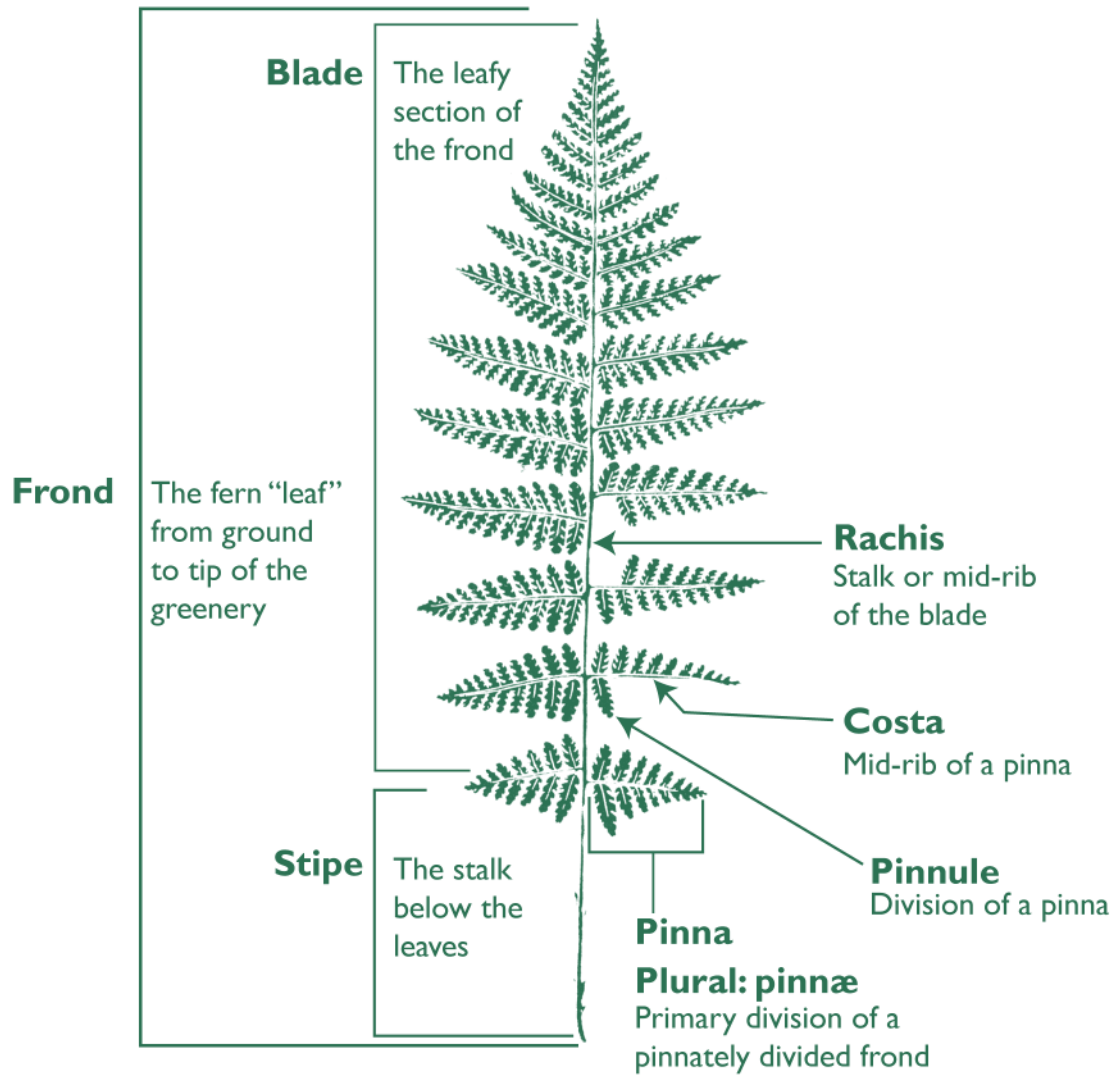
Counties found in: **All**

Notes from Don Lubin: Fronds grow in distinct lines, not clusters. Stipe and rachis dark, blade twice-cut like Cinnamon fern, but pinnae narrow toward rachis.



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