



Bulblet Fern (*Cystopteris bulbifera*) - Seed-bearing Sporophyte



Did you Know?

- The Bulblet Fern loves to grow on the sheer cliff faces of the Niagara Escarpment
- No other fern produces 'bulblets' like this species
- The small bulblets produced by this species will eventually grow into a fern

Photo: Coastlander from Flickr.com

Habitat: Calcareous substrates: moist calcareous woods, limestone (dolostone) cliff faces, ledges, cracks and boulders

Develops Bulblets: July. Begin to drop in August

Range: Newfoundland to Southern Ontario, south to Georgia and west to Arkansas

Status: S5 - Secure ([what does this S-rank mean?](#))

<http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/glossary/srank.cfm>

Also Known As: Bulblet Bladder Fern



Photo: Anita363 from Flickr.com

Identification:

The Bulblet Fern is a long tapering fern that grows in a 'lax' or drooping form (unlike the upright growth form of some ferns).

The 30-60cm long pale green fronds have a distinct triangular shape, with a broader base of 10-15cm wide that tapers to a fine point at the tip. One way to tell Bulblet Fern apart from other ferns that grow out of the face of the Niagara Escarpment (such as Fragile Fern) is that the frond is widest at the base and tapers to a point.



The fronds arise in clusters and are commonly seen clinging to rocky cliff faces or boulders, although it's also common to see them growing in moist calcareous woods as well. **The stalk is often reddish** near the base. The small reproductive spore clusters (sori) appear on the back of the fronds, and can only be found later in the summer after they have developed.

The most unique feature of the Bulblet Fern is the small green BB sized seeds, or bulblets, that it produces. These resemble tiny peas and can be found on the underside of the frond. Late July and August are the best times to see the bulblets at maturity, before they drop to the ground and sprout up a new fern. The Bulblet Fern will begin to wither and die in September.

The Bulblet Fern on the Niagara Escarpment

The Bulblet Fern is a staple of the Niagara Escarpment. Because it really enjoys growing in calcareous habitats, the dolostone cliffs and boulders along the Bruce Trail are perfect for it to thrive. Although it grows much smaller with limited soil, you'll often see it clinging to the Escarpment face in conditions that would seem virtually inhospitable to other plants.



Photo: Richtid from Wikipedia.com

Interesting Facts:

- The small bulblets produced by the Bulblet Fern are completely unique to this species. No other fern reproduces this way.
- Along with the bulblets, the Bulblet Fern can also reproduce traditionally as with other ferns through spores
- The Bulblet Fern typically produces 2-12 bulblets per frond
- The Bulblet Fern can hybridize with other ferns, such as the Fragile Fern
- The ferns that grow from bulblets are identical clones of their parent fern



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Photos: ArthurVailable from Flickr.com (Left) and Coastlander from Flickr.com (Right)