



Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)

– Evergreen fern of the forest



Did you Know?

- The fronds were commonly collected and used as Christmas decorations by early European settlers
- Due to its evergreen nature it is commonly used in landscaping to add colour to gardens during the dull days of winter

Photo : 2008 Louis-M.Landry

Habitat – Deciduous forests, rocky outcrops, rocky open woods, wooded slopes

Size – Fronds can grow between 30- 91 cm long and 5 – 12 cm wide

Range – Eastern North America from Nova Scotia west to Minnesota and south to Florida

Flowering Date – Non-flowering

Status – S5/ Common in Ontario

Other names – Canker Brake, Dagger Fern



Identification:

Typically grows in a fountain-like clump and features leathery, lance-shaped, evergreen fronds. Upper fronds are distinctly narrower. Shape of the bristle-tipped pinnae resemble Christmas stockings which combined with its evergreen nature through the winter months suggests its common name. The young fiddleheads in spring are silvery and scaled as they slowly unroll to produce the fronds. Can be confused with the Holly Ferns (Braun's and Northern Holly Fern).

Photo : 2008 Louis-M.Landry

Interesting Facts

This fern can serve a soil conservation and erosion control function on steep slopes. The fronds are semi-erect until the first hard frost, after which they recline to be flat on the ground often holding in place fallen leaves. This feature along with the accumulated debris of past sterile fronds, form a dense covering mass creating organic material and stabilizing the underlying soil.

Ground dwelling animals and birds use it for protective cover year round especially during the winter. It is used by some butterfly species to host their larvae.

It can often be found growing with other wood ferns and is usually seen growing in clusters of two or three individuals however it can produce large colonies in some areas.

Although common in Ontario, it is considered vulnerable in New York State and threatened in Minnesota.



Bruce Trail
CONSERVANCY



Christmas Fern on the Niagara Escarpment

This fern is commonly seen as you traverse The Bruce Trail under the treed canopy along the Escarpment. It stays green all winter long so it is easy to spot patches nestled amongst the snow in the cold, frozen landscape of the forest floor.

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is continually acquiring and protecting land along the Niagara Escarpment, often including land that contains rich forested areas that are perfect habitat for the Christmas Fern.