

Fern Tracker

At first glance, many ferns look alike. But if you take a second look, these beautiful plants provide clues to help you identify them. Use the illustrations to the right to see how many you can find!

Fern Forms

The **blade**, or leaf, of a fern can be found in five major forms. Look at how the blade splits into leaflets. How many blade forms can you find?

Entire



Pinnatifid



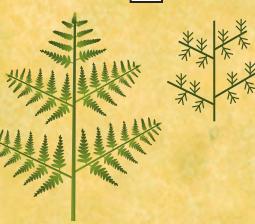
Pinnate



Bipinnate



Tripinnate



Spores Not Seeds

Most plants use seeds to reproduce, but ferns use **single cells called spores**. Depending on the fern species, spore-producing objects called **sori** are found on either fronds or stalks. Some spores that are released and find moist ground will germinate. Can you find sori on a fern? _____



Bracken Fern
(*Pteridium aquilinum*)

Do the fronds feel leathery? Are there spores along the curled edges of some of the leaflets?



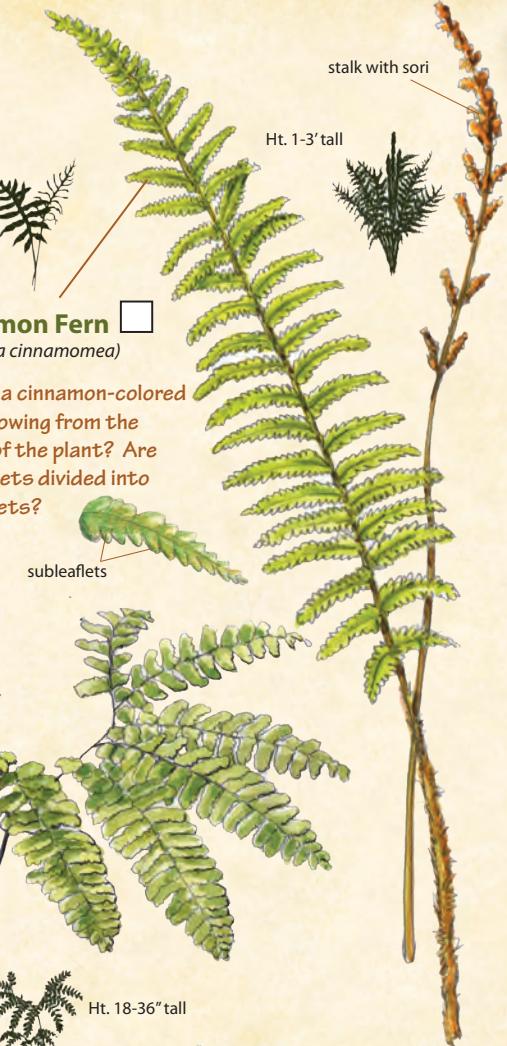
Christmas Fern
(*Polystichum acrostichoides*)

Is the leaflet shaped like a stocking? Are there sori on the underside of some of the leaflets? Is the fern in a pinnate form?



Cinnamon Fern
(*Osmunda cinnamomea*)

Is there a cinnamon-colored stalk growing from the center of the plant? Are the leaflets divided into subleaflets?



Northern Maidenhair
(*Adiantum pedatum*)

Are the stems thin and black? Do the delicate fronds spread in a circular pattern? Are the leaflets round on the tips and square near the stem?

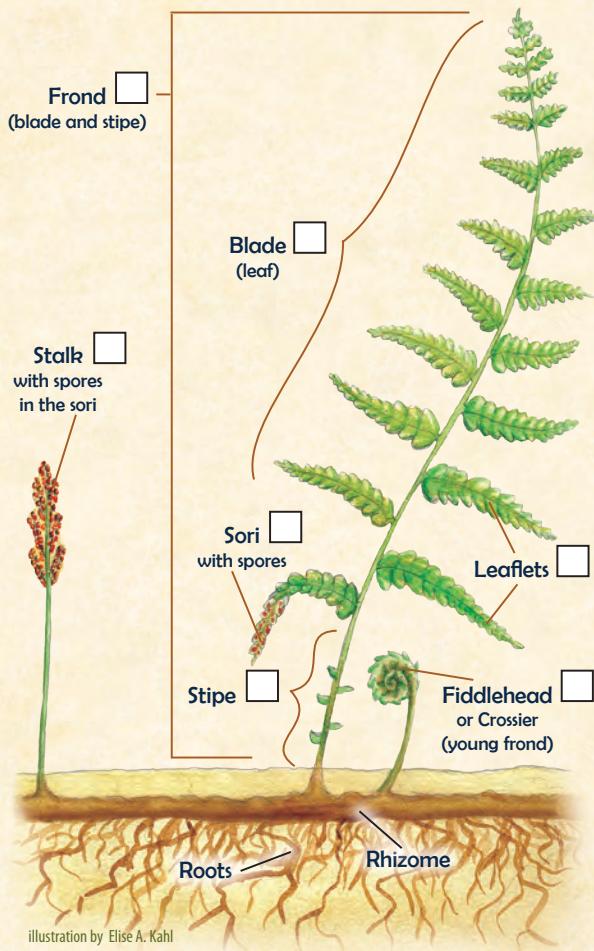


Illustrations by
David Williams. WingInkWorks

Fern Parts

The image below shows all the major parts that might be found on a fern. Find a fern near the trail. How many different parts can you identify?

Note: not all ferns have all of these parts.

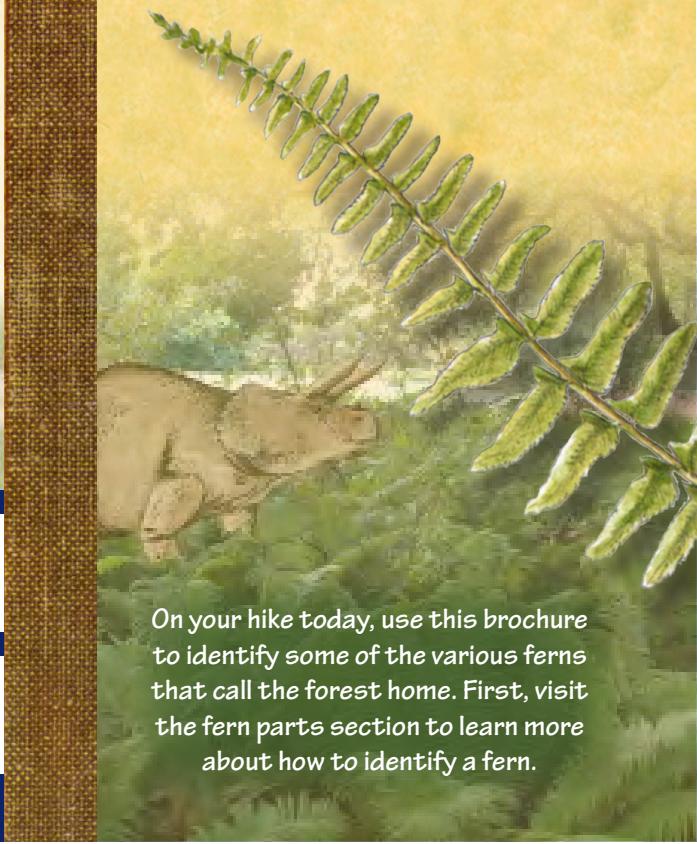


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Finding Ferns

Have you ever walked on a path with ferns and wonder if there is a dinosaur nearby? Ferns are among the oldest types of plants on Earth and were one of the dominant plants when dinosaurs lived. Today, ferns grow all over the world in many shapes and sizes.



On your hike today, use this brochure to identify some of the various ferns that call the forest home. First, visit the fern parts section to learn more about how to identify a fern.