

Athyrium filix-femina

[Synonyms : *Aspidium angustum*, *Aspidium asplenioides*, *Aspidium filix-femina*, *Asplenium filix-femina*, *Asplenium michauxii*, *Athyrium angustum*, *Athyrium arcuatum*, *Athyrium barnebyanum*, *Athyrium bourgaei*, *Athyrium contingens*, *Athyrium dentatum*, *Athyrium dombeyi*, *Athyrium ensiferum*, *Athyrium excelsius*, *Athyrium filix-femina* var. *dombeyi*, *Athyrium galeottii*, *Athyrium lancipinnulum*, *Athyrium michauxii*, *Athyrium nudifrons*, *Athyrium oblongum*, *Athyrium paramicola*, *Athyrium paucifrons*, *Athyrium pumilio*, *Athyrium supranigrescens*, *Athyrium tarulakaense*, *Athyrium tsaii*, *Lastrea filix-femina*, *Nephrodium filix-femina*, *Polypodium filix-femina*]

LADY-FERN is a deciduous fern. Native to northern temperate climates (particularly North America) it has feathery green fronds.

It is also known as Common lady-fern, Fern, *Fouâle d'orvé* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Hiirenporras* (Finnish), *Majbräken* (Swedish), *Papradka samičia* (Slovak), *Papratka samice* (Czech), *Papratka samiči* (Czech), Spring fern, and *Wald-Frauenfarn* (German).

Warning – although less potent than the male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) lady-fern is also poisonous and can cause some similar symptoms eg. delirium, nausea, vomiting, blindness and death (cardiac and respiratory failure).

Filix-femina is derived from Latin *filix* (fern) and *femina* (female) components with reference to the delicacy of the fronds of lady-fern compared with those of the male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*).

The name Spring fern refers to the plant's enjoyment of areas near springs. This affinity was relied upon by the North American Okanagan-Colville Indians who identified the presence of water nearby upon the sight of the plant when travelling through mountainous areas.

The fronds seem to have been used as cooking tools by various North American Indian tribes such as the Nitinaht and Cowlitz who used them as cooking lids, or for layering cooking food, while the Shuswap tribe used them to cover baskets of harvested berries. The Quileute and Karok tribes on the other hand used the leaves to clean fish. As actual food new shoots and the centre of roasted and peeled underground stems were eaten by the Quinault and Quileute North American Indian tribes and some of the Salish Indians as well.

For several tribes the fern also held medicinal attributes. It was valued by the Potawatomi, some of the Chippewa, the Meskwaki and Makah tribes for treating various female disorders. The Hesquiat Indians used it for some forms of cancer, and the Cowlitz and Meskwaki turned to it for easing various pains. For the Thompson Indians a plant infusion could stem some internal haemorrhaging, while the Chippewa used a root decoction for some urinary problems.

Lady-fern is commemorated in verse. One example is provided by the well-loved Scottish novelist and poet, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). The first of his novels to appear was *Waverley* in 1814 and in this he wrote a song called *Hie Away, Hie Away*.

Hie away, hie away,
Over bank and over brae,
Where the copsewood is the greenest,

Where the fountains glisten sheenest,
Where the lady-fern grows strongest,
Where the morning dew lies longest,

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Medicinally, lady-fern can be used today by herbalists as a remedy for worms. It is considered to be a weaker alternative to male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) with which it shares some of the poisoning symptoms.