

*Blechnum spicant*

[Synonyms : *Blechnum boreale*, *Blechnum doodiodes*, *Blechnum spicant* var. *elongatum*, *Blechnum spicant* subsp. *nipponicum*, *Lomaria spicant*, *Osmunda borealis*, *Osmunda spicant*, *Spicanta borealis*, *Struthiopteris spicant*]

**HARD FERN** is an evergreen fern. Native to the northern hemisphere (including Britain) it has tufts of lance-shaped feathery leathery green fronds.

It is also known as *Almindelig kambregne* (Danish), *An raineach chruaidh* (Scots Gaelic), Common hard fern, Deer fern, Herringbone fern, *Kambräken* (Swedish), *Kampasaniainen* (Finnish), Ladder fern, Northern fern, *Rebrovka rôznolistá* (Slovak), *Rippenfarn* (German), Rough spleenwort, Snake fern, and *Žebrovice různolistá* (Czech).

*Spicant* is derived from Latin *spica* (ear of corn, spike) meaning ‘spiked or tufted’ with reference to the central fertile fronds.

Authorities believe that hard fern, which is viewed as an indicator of damp forest or woodland, can survive a relatively light fire and will regenerate from its underground stems.

For the Hesquiat and Nitinaht North American Indian tribes the young stems and fronds could be eaten cooked as emergency rations if for instance they were lost on a journey. On the other hand the Makah tribe placed fronds beneath cooking food to flavour it. (The Nitinaht and Quinault tribes placed fronds under food (and on top) although records do not suggest that this provided flavouring.)

Yurok Indians have used the leaves for bedding, and unusually authorities have noted that plants were potted for indoor decoration by the Haisla and Hanaksiala tribes.

Several tribes have put the fern to medicinal use. The Kwakiutl Indians take it to treat diarrhoea, and the Makah tribe use it for various lung and stomach disorders. According to the Quinault wind could be eased by chewing the leaves, and the Hesquiat tribe chewed them to treat some internal cancer. The latter also applied it to skin sores and the Quileute tribe applied leaf poultices to ease paralysis.

Apparently hard fern is eaten by deer and mountain goats – and when their antlers fall off the former also rub the antler stubs in it to aid healing.

Today hard fern is widely cultivated as an ornamental garden plant. Its evergreen nature is said to explain its use as an altar plant in Britain where it is the only native representative of its genus.

Hard fern is the badge of the Scottish Chisholm clan.