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Onoclea sensibilis

[Synonyms : *Calypterium sensibile*, *Onoclea augescens*, *Onoclea obtusilobata*, *Onoclea sensibilis* var. *obtusilobata*, *Pterinodes sensibile*, *Ragiopteris obtusilobata*, *Ragiopteris onocleoides*, *Riedlea sensibilis*]

CREEPING SENSITIVE FERN is a deciduous fern. Native to north-eastern Asia and eastern North America it has green fronds that are bronze to pink when young.

It is also known as American oak fern, Bead fern, Meadow fern, Oakleaf fern, *Pärnbräken* (Swedish), and Sensitive fern.

Warning – all parts of this fern are believed to be poisonous for livestock and some authorities suspect that it could be poisonous for humans if taken in large quantities.

Sensibilis is Latin (recognised by the senses) meaning ‘sensitive ie. quickly responsive to touch or changes in light, humidity, temperature, etc.’.

Some authorities claim that the meaning of the species name extends to those of its common names which include ‘sensitive’ with reference to this fern wilting if it is touched by frost.

North American Iroquois Indians cooked the young sterile fronds and ate them seasoned.

The fern was also a source of medicine according to records and the Iroquois tribe used it to treat blood problems, tuberculosis, venereal disease, rheumatism and wounds, and they and some of the Chippewa Indians also turned to it for remedies for some female problems.

In Asia the young fronds (or ‘fiddleheads’) have been sold in local markets for eating as a delicacy – while in some regions in contrast the root has provided famine food.

It would seem that sensitive fern used to be yet another of the many ‘cures’ to be found all over the world for baldness and in this case a plant decoction of it was used as a hairwash.

Creeping sensitive fern is often cultivated as an ornamental plant today.