

# Ostrich Fern

## *Matteucia struthiopteris* (*M. pensylvanica*)

*North American Native*



*Matteucia* (ma-too-see-a)

Named after Carlo Matteucci (1811-1863), a physicist at the University of Florence, Italy and later a politician.

*struthiopteris* (stroo-thee-op-te-ris)

(syn. *M. pensylvanica*)

From Greek, struthokamelos, an ostrich, and pteris, a fern, as the fronds resemble ostrich feathers. (*pensylvanica* of or from Pennsylvania, United States.)



### About the Species:

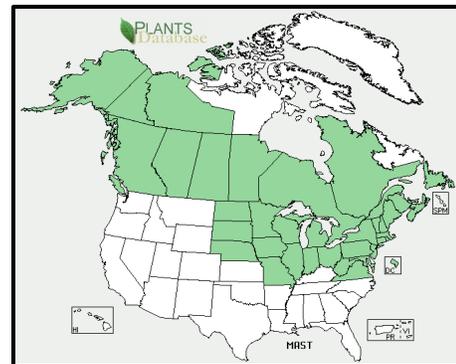
**Family:** Dryopteridaceae

This bold, vase-shaped fern has two different types of fronds (leaves). The large deciduous sterile feathery fronds are deeply cut into lobes and will grow to be 3-4 feet tall and 24 inches wide. They form a vase-like crown around the fertile, dark glossy green, deciduous fronds that emerge later. Stiffly erect in the center the fertile fronds will emerge in July-August. They will turn brown and remain upright and ornamental throughout the winter. The fertile fronds are useful in holiday decorations and will last for years.

**Zones:** 2 - 8 **Height:** 3 - 4' **Spacing:** 18"

**Habitat:** Moist woodlands and swampy areas.

**In the Garden:** Ostrich Fern grows best in average to moist or wet humus rich (high in organic material) soil, with consistent moisture. Plant next to a streambed for an ideal location. Ostrich Ferns require partial to full shade, and they are intolerant of drought and drying winds as this will cause the fronds to scorch. During drought conditions, Ostrich Ferns can be cut back as they will flush out again. Ostrich Ferns grow from stem-like rhizomes and the stolons can be quite vigorous, covering large areas which may also provide erosion control. Keep this fern away from your dainty and expensive plants. Ostrich Ferns make quite a statement when used in moist woodlands, ponds or stream edges. They grow natively in swampy areas to a height of 6 feet or taller. The architectural form of this fern can be used as a backdrop for statuary, to block an unsightly view, to direct foot traffic, as a focal point, or in mass. Use the cut fronds (sterile) in cut flower bouquets, and the dried fronds (fertile) in dried flower arrangements and holiday decorations.



USDA Plants Database

### Tasty Feathers

Ostrich Fern fiddleheads are edible and are the only fern available for sale to the public in this stage. The flavor has been compared to asparagus. Ostrich Fern fiddleheads were a regular part of the diet of Canadian settlers by the early 1700's. Today they can be found canned, frozen, or fresh. Many restaurants serve them when they become available in the spring. The state of Maine produces a great amount of canned fiddleheads each year. One company reported that they process an average of 25-30 tons of fiddleheads each year.

The young fiddleheads (young coiled sterile fronds) are collected in the early spring by several canning companies. Fiddleheads are usually boiled for 15 minutes or steamed for 10-12 minutes before eating to be safe. The edible fiddlehead is the state vegetable of Vermont.