Sensitive Fern

Onoclea sensibilis

North American Native

Onoclea **(**on-oh-*klee*-uh) From the Greek *ono,s* meaning vessel, and *kleio*, to close, refers to the closely rolled fertile fronds

sensibilis (sen-*si*-bi-lis) from the Latin, sensitive.

About the Species:

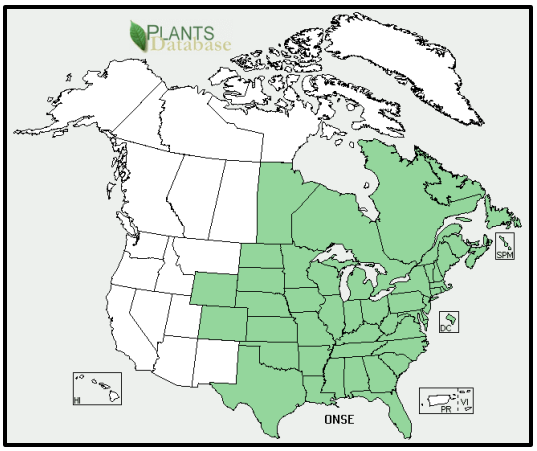
Zones: 2 - 10 **Height**: 18" **Spacing:** 18"

Family: Dryopteridaceae

The fronds of the Sensitive Fern are very coarsely textured, having one of the broadest leaves found in the mid-Atlantic region. The deciduous, 18 inches high, sterile fronds are light green and leathery, and very distinctive. The edges of the margins are wavy, not toothed like most ferns. The fertile fronds are brown and shorter than the sterile fronds. The fertile fronds are produced in August thru September and persist into the next year, creating winter interest. The fertile fronds are hardy enough to be used in dried and holiday arrangements. The sterile fronds turn brown and die back to the ground with the first frost, earning its common name of Sensitive Fern. *Onoclea sensibilis* grows from a root system of creeping rhizomes near the surface of the soil. The roots are extensively branched and spread quickly.

Habitat: Sensitive Fern is found growing in wet meadows, thickets, woods, banks of streams and river, swamps, and in bogs. Sometimes these ferns are found growing along dried up streambeds and drainage ditches that will fill up with water when heavy rains fall.

In the Garden: This fern tolerates the toughest of conditions and is considered a low maintenance plant for moist sites. *Onocolea sensibilis* will want to have shade or part shade, but will tolerate sun with adequate moisture. Average garden soil on the acidic side with extra moisture will provide this fern with what it needs to grow well. Sensitive fern will tolerate wet soils and is very useful planted near water. Caution: this fern may cause poisoning and in some cases death in older horses.



USDA Plants Database

Prehistoric and Still Popular.

From the Dinosaur era to the modern world of today, Sensitive Fern continues as it was growing several million years ago. Fossils of this fern have been found dating back more than 60 million years and look remarkably similar to today's Sensitive Fern. This and other ferns have been popular in gardens for many years as well. Evolution gardens, or' Jurassic' gardens can turn a shady corner into a prehistoric wonderland. By using *Gymnosperms* (conifers) and seedless plants such as ferns, and *Selaginellas* you can replicate the plant culture that early man might have recognized.

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