

FERN CHECKLIST



FERN PRINTS
BY NELSON MAHER

Welcome To Owen Sound. The Fern Capital of Ontario.

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Green and graceful, ferns embody a charm that is almost universal. The lush symmetry of their arching fronds draws many a weary city-dweller back to woodlands, escarpments and streams, even if the tired traveller is unable to tell one fern from another. And ferns are somehow the emblem of a shady forest, a symbol of its cool solitude and repose, inspiring a poetical turn of mind in even the most prosaic of us. Surely no Garden of Eden would be complete without them.

Today a garden of ferns can be found in Grey & Bruce Counties between the Rocky Saugeen north of Durham and just south of Lion's Head. Here lies the best area for ferns in Ontario if not all of North America. Over 40 varieties of ferns, some of them rare, grow in mostly heady profusion (unlike other areas of Ontario that usually have fewer than 25). The east side of the peninsula, where the white cliffs plunge deeply into Georgian Bay, has the greatest diversity and numbers of ferns because so many of them thrive on the limestone escarpment, both in the wooded areas on top and on the face and the talus below. So if you'd like to delve a little deeper into the world of ferns, Grey-Bruce is the place to be.

Ferns are one of the oldest living plants on the face of the earth existing 350 million years ago.

Inglis Falls is one of the most scenic spots to observe a variety of ferns. Hart's Tongue, Northern Holly and Green Spleenwort are among the twenty or more ferns which are seen within the sound of the waterfall. This area is one of Grey Sauble Conservation Authority properties.

The Walking Fern, which is the symbol of the Bruce Trail, is fairly easily spotted along the escarpment from Owen Sound to Wiarton, but Bruce's Caves at Oxenden is a great place to visit summer or winter. Yes, even in winter because many ferns like the Walking Fern are evergreen and found on the big boulders in front of the caves.

One of my favourite spots to visit is Black's Park off 6th Avenue West in Owen Sound. The twenty-nine species of ferns I have found there include both Smooth and Slender Cliffbrake, Maidenhair Spleenwort on the face of the escarpment, with Christmas and Goldies' Fern above in the woodlot. It is a pleasant walk and joins the Bruce Trail which skirts the city from this point.

The smallest fern, the Wall-Rue is found above the caves on the Georgian Bay Trail at Cyprus Lake in the Bruce Peninsula National Park as well as on Flower Pot Island. This fern is rare; only found elsewhere in a few stations in Michigan and on Manitoulin Island.

Kemble Hill and Massie Hills ski trail hosts many ferns; notable among them the Large Male Fern, Holly and Hart's Tongue. The Indian Potholes of Hope Bay, Dyer's Bay Junction at Highway 6, the Tobermory Bog and Walker's Woods at Sauble Beach are all great spots for locating various species.

Many ferns are on private property but most private land is quite accessible. If you tell them about your botanical interests, most owners are very friendly and in many cases will give you directions. However, they may not be as hospitable if you show up with a large group of people who can easily damage sensitive areas.

"Take nothing but photos, leave only your thanks."