

Christmas fern *Polystichum acrostichoides*

Kingdom: Plantae

Division/Phylum: Pteridophyta

Class: Filicopsida

Order: Polypodiales

Family: Dryopteridaceae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

Christmas fern leaves grow in clusters from a central rootstock. Each leaf may be three feet long and four inches wide. The leaf tapers noticeably upward past the midpoint. Each leaflet is lance-shaped with an “ear.” The lower and middle leaflets alternate along the stalk. The upper leaflets point upward. Twenty to 40 pairs of leaflets are present on a leaf. The leaf stalk (stipe) is much shorter than the leaf and very scaly. This stipe is brown at the base and green above.

BEHAVIORS

The Christmas fern may be found statewide in Illinois. This fern grows in woods, on rocky, shaded slopes, on wooded streambanks, in ravines, on stone walls and in swamps. It grows best in rocky or sandy soil. The Christmas fern produces spores from June through October. The leaves are evergreen. It grows in colonies or in groups of two or three plants. Its common name comes from the fact that its leaves are green at Christmas.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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