

SOUTHERN LADY FERN

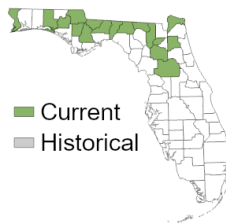
Athyrium asplenioides (Michx.) A.A. Eat.

Synonyms: *Athyrium filix-femina* (L.) Roth
ssp. *asplenioides* (Michx.) Hulten

Family: Athyriaceae (lady fern)

FNAI Ranks: G5T5/S4

Legal Status: US-none; FL-Threatened



Petioles dark red in color; leaves 2 - 3 - divided and glabrous. Underside of leaf with J-shaped spore-bearing structures. Upland hardwood forest at Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

Field Description: A medium-sized **fern** 0.5 - 1 m tall. **Leaves** with blade widest near the base and with 2 - 3x pinnate leaves with obvious teeth on small leaflets, elongate **sori** 2 - 3x as long as wide and larger sori typically curved or J-shaped and extending across the leaf veins. Veins free, simple or forked. In situ, the species will often have a pinkish-purple cast to the **rachis**. This is not a diagnostic feature, but from a distance can draw attention to the species.

Similar Species: Japanese false spleenwort (*Deparia petersenii*) is a very similar species. Japanese false spleenwort has monomorphic fertile and sterile leaves with linear sori and at least some sori paired back-to-back along a single vein; the larger sori generally straight and not extending across veins; indusia present and flaplike, attached along a long side. Mature blades 1-pinnate; lower pair of veins from adjacent pinna lobes free. Similar also to the Thelypteridaceae, which has 1x pinnate-pinnatifid leaves (vs. 2x or more pinnate-pinnatifid) and rounded sori (vs. sori curved and extending across veins).

southern lady fern

Athyrium asplenioides

Related Rare Species: There are no other closely related rare species in Florida.

Habitat: Upland hardwood forest, slope forests, and seepage streams.

Best Survey Season: May - September.

Range-wide Distribution: MA, WV, IL, and KS south to north FL and eastern TX.

Conservation Status: The species is relatively common within the Florida panhandle and is primarily threatened by silviculture and invasive plant species.

Protection and Management: Protect upland hardwood forest, slope forests, and seepage streams from silviculture and appropriately manage invasive plant species. Adjacent uplands should be protected as this species typically associates with braided seepage streams at the base of hardwood slopes and erosion from uplands may negatively affect these areas.

References: Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2024, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011.



Leaf blade widest near the base. Many large limestone boulders scattered throughout upland hardwood forest at Aucilla Wildlife Management Area.
Photo by Kelly Anderson.

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Growing on lower slope of upland hardwood forest near seepage stream at Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.