

HAND FERN

Ophioglossum palmatum L.

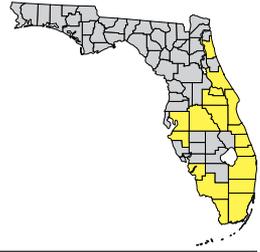
Synonym: *Cheiroglossa palmata* (L.) Presl.

Family: Ophioglossaceae (adder's tongue)

FNAI Ranks: G4/S2

Legal Status: US—none FL—Endangered

Wetland Status: US—FAC+ FL—UPL



Gil Nelson

Field Description: Fern with flat, fleshy, drooping, coarsely veined, ever-green leaves, with up to 7 lobes or “fingers” and long leaf stalks. **Spores** produced on small erect structures (**sporangial spikes**) arising from the leaf stalk. **Roots** are buried in humus accumulated in the bases of palm fronds.

Similar Species: Golden polypody (*Phlebodium aureum*) also grows from palm “boots,” but its leaves are thin, not fleshy, and have more segments, most bearing conspicuous, round clusters of spores (sori) on the back side.

Related Rare Species: Winter grape fern (*Botrychium lunarioides*), a diminutive terrestrial fern found in the Panhandle, is rare in FL.

Hand fern

Ophioglossum palmatum

Habitat: “Boots,” or old leaf bases, of cabbage palms in maritime hammocks and wet hammocks. Plants have been seen once in a saw palmetto “boot.”

Best Survey Season: All year.

Range-wide Distribution: FL, Mexico, West Indies, Central and South America, Viet Nam, Madagascar, Seychelles, Reunion.

Conservation Status: Early 20th century observers spoke of hand fern gathered by the wagon load from Florida’s swamps. Hand fern is still collected but it dies in cultivation due to lack of essential fungi. When palm boots decay and fall to the ground, or are destroyed by fire, hand ferns are killed. Only 50 populations remain in FL, about half in conservation areas.

Protection & Management: Protect swamps and hammocks from drainage, fire, and development. Enforce plant protection laws, and prosecute plant poachers.

References: Chrysler 1941, Coile 2000, FNA 1993, IRC 1999, Langdon 1981a, Mesler 1974, Nauman 1986, Nelson 2000, Small 1938, Ward 1979, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000b.

