

CINNAMON FERN

Osmundastrum cinnamomeum (L.) C. Presl

Synonyms: *Osmunda cinnamomea* L.

Family: Osmundaceae (royal fern)

FNAI Ranks: G5/S4

Legal Status: US-none; FL-Commercially Exploited



Leaves pinnate-pinnatifid with leaves bearing lobes along each side of axis. Floodplain swamp at Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

Field Description: Terrestrial **fern** with large pinnate fronds 1.0 - 1.8 m long. Plants with dimorphic **leaves** (each leaf normally either completely photosynthetic or completely fertile); **photosynthetic** (sterile) **pinnae** with tufts of reddish hairs near the junction with the rachis.

Similar Species: When in bloom, not likely to be confused with any other fern species. When not in bloom, it may be confused with Virginia chain fern (*Anchistea virginica*). Virginia chain fern is easily differentiated by its rhizomatous habit, leaves borne on dark brown to black petioles, and dense, unbroken spore-producing structures on a single leaf (not dimorphic).

Related Rare Species: The commercially exploited species royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*) is found throughout Florida and often shares the same habitat as cinnamon fern. Royal fern has leaf sections that are doubly divided and sporangia only occupy the upper portion of the fertile fronds whereas cinnamon fern has leaflets only divided once and sori cover the entire fertile frond.

cinnamon fern

Osmundastrum cinnamomeum

Habitat: Swamps, bogs, wet pine flatwoods, and marshes; mesic and hydric hammocks.

Best Survey Season: Identifiable all year.

Range-wide Distribution: Found throughout FL except for the extreme southern peninsula. Also found in the eastern US and Canada ranging south to the West Indies, Mexico, and South America.

Conservation Status: Apparently secure in Florida. Known to occur in almost every county in FL with the exception of extreme south Florida (Miami-Dade, Monroe Counties and the Florida Keys) and a few other counties: Holmes, Dixie, Flagler, Sumter, Pinellas, and Hendry.

Protection and Management: Maintain wet pine flatwoods and ecotones with appropriate fire return intervals (2-4 years for grassy wet flatwoods) and avoid timber harvesting in bottomland forest types.

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



Fertile reddish-brown leaves are narrower than sterile leaves. Floodplain swamp at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

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Sterile green leaves with tufts of hair on the lower surface. Floodplain swamp at Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Growing in wet flatwoods at Aucilla Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.