

LEAST HALBERD FERN

Tectaria fimbriata (Willd.) Proctor & Lourteig

Synonyms: *Tectaria lobata* (C. Presl) C.V.

Morton; *Tectaria minima* Underw.

Family: Tectariaceae (halberd fern)

FNAI Ranks: G4/S2

Legal Status: US-none FL-Endangered

Wetland Status: US-OBL*+ FL-FACW



Gil Nelson

Field Description: Fern with leaves rising in clusters from creeping stems; **leaf blades** 2 - 4 inches long and 1 - 3 inches wide, deeply lobed or dissected, sometimes with basal segments separated from upper blade, lobes rounded. **Leaf stalks** tan, 1 - 3 times the length of the blade; **sori** on the underside of the leaf blade, each sorus covered with a small, round flap of tissue (**indusium**) connected at its center to the leaf blade.

Similar Species: Incised halberd fern (*Tectaria incisa*) is a large, coarse fern with 3 - 6 pairs of slightly toothed leaflets that occurs in hammocks in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. It was recently introduced from tropical America.

Related Rare Species: Broad halberd fern (*Tectaria heracleifolia*), state-threatened, has blades 6 - 16 inches long and 6 - 12 inches wide, with 1 - 3 pairs of wavy-

least halberd fern

Tectaria fimbriata

marginated segments; it occurs in rocky, moist hammocks in central and south Florida. Ames halberd fern (*Tectaria x amesiana*), a hybrid of least halberd fern and hairy halberd fern (*Tectaria coriandrifolia*), was known from Dade County but has been extirpated, as was hairy halberd fern.

Habitat: Tropical hammocks; on limestone outcrops.

Best Survey Season: All year.

Range-wide Distribution: FL, Yucatan, Bahamas, and Greater Antilles.

Conservation Status: Ten of the 15 known populations in FL are in small parks in Dade County. These populations are vulnerable to plant poaching, exotic species encroachment, and alterations of the water table.

Protection and Management: Protect rockland hammocks from clearing, development, and lowering of the water table. Maintain shaded, moist conditions in hammocks. Eradicate exotic pest plant species. Enforce plant protection laws and prosecute plant poachers.

References: Coile 2000, FNA 1993, IRC 1999, Lakela and Long 1976, Nauman 1986, Nelson 2000, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000b.