

Pteridium aquilinum* var. *caudatum **Family: Dennstaedtiaceae**
Lacy bracken fern; bracken fern; southern brackenfern



S.H. Brown

A single frond with alternating 3-pinnate on the rachis of lacy bracken fern. Early September

Lacy Bracken Fern

Synonyms (Discarded Names): *Allosorus caudatus*; *Cinicialis caudata*; *Felix-foemina aquilina* var. *caudata*; *Pteridium aquilinum* var. *caudatum*; *Pteridium cadatum*; *Pteris caudata*

Origin: South Florida; Mexico; tropical America

U.S.D.A. Zone: 9a—11b (20°F minimum)

Growth Rate: Fast

Flowering Months: Not applicable

Leaf Persistence: Evergreen

Salt Tolerance: Low

Drought Tolerance: Good in partial shade

Soil: Moist-dry; well-draining

Nutritional Requirements: Low

Major Potential Pests: None recorded

Typical Dimensions: Up to 12 feet tall

Leaf type: 2- to 3-pinnate-pinnatifid

Propagation: Terminal rhizomes pieces

Human hazards: Dangerous to eat: fiddleheads contain a carcinogen and an enzyme that destroys vitamin B.

Uses: Natural Areas; stone gardens; border/screening; can become weedy



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Fronds are several times divided, broadly triangular with 2-3 pinnate-pinnatifid blades



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A single frond with alternating 2-pinnate (top) and 3-pinnate (bottom) leaflets on the rachis

Nomenclature

Pteridium consists of a single cosmopolitan and variable species. Apparently three varieties occur in Florida; *Pteridium aquilinum* var. *caudatum*; *P. aquilinum* var. *latiusculum* and *P. aquilinum* var. *pseudocaudatum*. The leaf blade of the three varieties are 2- to 3-pinnate-pinnatifid. However, the lower surface of the frond of lacy bracken fern, *P. aquilinum* var. *caudatum*, usually has abundant, straight, stiff hairs. The fronds of the other two varieties are glabrous (without hairs) or pubescent (soft downy hairs). In addition, the fertile terminal pinnules of var. *caudatum* are less than 2 mm (0.08 inches) wide whereas those of the others are mostly more than 3 mm (0.1 inches) wide.



Tri-pinnate fronds



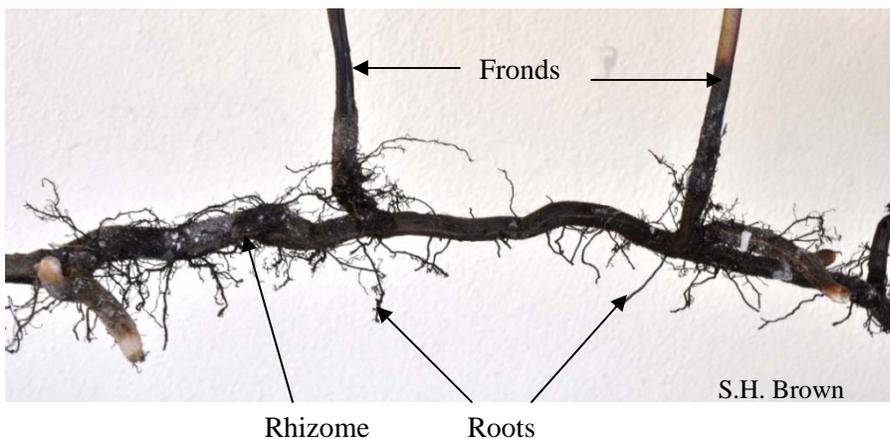
The lower surface of the fronds have abundant, straight, stiff hairs.

Geographic Distribution

Lacy bracken fern is a facultative upland species. It usually occurs in non-wetlands, but is occasionally found in wetlands. In south Florida it is associated with pine flatwoods. Vouchered samples have been collected from Citrus County on Florida's west coast and from Brevard County on the east coast south to the Florida Keys.

Growth Habit, Ecological Function and Propagation

Lacy bracken fern is a herbaceous perennial fern. It grows in strongly acid to alkaline soils. As a pioneer plant in natural areas, lacy bracken fern's light, windborne spores allow colonization of vacant areas. It requires a lot of space as it spreads quickly and can become invasive forming dense thickets of large colonies. Its dense growth habit makes it an excellent environment for small mammals and birds. The solitary fronds are spaced about 10 cm (4 inches) or more apart along fast growing rhizomes. The rhizomes are several inches below the soil surface. They sprout vigorously following fires and before competing vegetation is established. In south Florida fronds from rhizomes are produced year round. For propagation, use actively growing rhizomes with some roots along their length. Remove the fronds and cut the rhizomes into sections about 6 inches long. Plant the sections to the same depth as the parent plant in a shallow container with ample drainage. Keep the soil moist and cover the container with some material to ensure humidity.



A newly emerged solitary frond

Planting and Maintenance Guidelines

Lacy bracken fern requires a large area as it is an aggressive grower. It tolerates drier soils than most ferns but requires a moist soil and adequate humidity if grown in full sun. Large areas of the colony may dieback due to abiotic factors. Dead fronds and stems can be removed to present a vibrant appearance.



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Fronde emergence from rhizome.
July 7



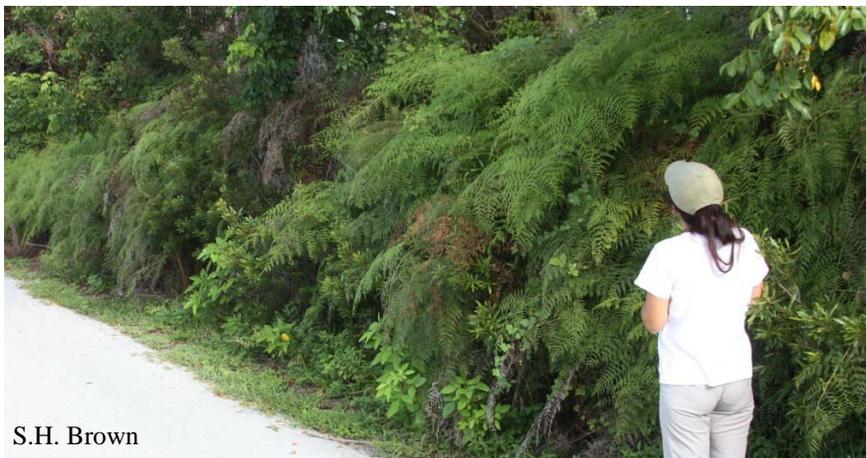
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Close up of newly emerging fronds.
July 7



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Fronde formation. July 21



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Dieback of the upper growth of this lacy bracken fern in July. The dieback of the fern was not determined to be caused by disease.

References

Nelson, Gil. 2000. *The Ferns of Florida: A Reference and Field Guide*. Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Florida

Wunderlin, Richard & Bruce Hansen, *Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants* <http://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/Default.aspx>

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