

Tales from Along the Trail...

# Christmas Fern: A Fern For All Seasons

*Polystichum Acrostichoides* with Naturalist Catherine Ricks



Catherine Ricks

Look for our native, evergreen Christmas fern tucked in and protecting snowy hillsides along the woodland trails bordering the river. Take a closer look at the two distinct types of leaves. The narrow, fertile fronds have spore-bearing leaflets that are brown and shriveled by winter. The rusty fruitdots (spore cases) are only in the top third of the fertile leaf. The sterile leaves will stay a beautiful evergreen throughout the winter. Despite the tasty green color, it is unappetizing, and few browsers will make it a wintry snack. Come back to see the silvery, grey fiddleheads in early spring and start looking for wildflowers.



fertile leaflets starting to turn brown

Catherine Ricks



fertile leaves showing fruitdots

shorter, sterile leaves

Catherine Ricks

The Christmas fern's common name comes from the earliest settlers gathering it for their own Christmas decorations. The ferns were once heavily and commercially harvested for florists to create winter arrangements. Look closely at the leathery, rich green leaflet that some say resemble a "Christmas stocking" or "Santa's sleigh."



Catherine Ricks