




Matteuccia struthiopteris

Ostrich Fern

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic

Native mostly in the northern half of the Mid-Atlantic Region,* Ostrich Fern** is indigenous in only four places in Virginia, including along the Potomac River in Arlington and Fairfax counties. It requires a large landscape to show off to full advantage its long, finely dissected fronds, suggestive of ostrich plumes.



Fern	Fiddleheads, Sterile & Fertile Fronds, Colonies
Height: 3–6 feet	 
Spread: 5–8 feet	
Bloom Color: Non-flowering	
Characteristics	
Deciduous perennial in upright & arching clumps	
Fiddleheads emerge in spring, unfurling to arching, dissected pinnate-pinnatifid , medium green, 5-foot sterile fronds , which die back in fall	
Green fertile fronds emerge in summer, maturing to dark brown, erect and 1½ feet tall; they can persist for a year & release spores in early spring	
Spreads by underground rhizomes , vigorously under favorable conditions, to form large colonies	
Attributes	
Tolerates clay soil, dense shade, erosion, rabbits	
No serious pests or diseases	
Deer rarely damage	
Fiddleheads are harvested in early spring and sold as gourmet food in parts of New England	
Provides protective cover for wildlife	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements : Humus-rich, acidic	<i>Astilbe chinensis</i> var. <i>dauidii</i> - Chinese Astilbe
Light Requirements : Partial Shade, Shade	<i>Dryopteris wallichiana</i> - Alpine Wood Fern
Water Requirements : Moist, Wet	
Fertile fronds may not develop in dense shade or in immature plants; soils must not dry out	<p>*It is native to DC, northern and western MD, and much of PA. It is adventive (non-native; an escape from cultivation into natural areas) in the DE Piedmont. In VA, it is rare in the mountains (in Craig and Wythe counties) and in the Piedmont (In Arlington and Fairfax counties).</p> <p>**According to <i>Flora of North America</i>, it has two varieties: <i>Matteuccia struthiopteris</i> var. <i>pensylvanica</i> (aka <i>Matteuccia pensylvanica</i>) native to northeastern North America and <i>Matteuccia struthiopteris</i> var. <i>struthiopteris</i> native to Eurasia.</p>
Use as dramatic accent in large woodland gardens or wet areas with room to spread	
Hardiness : USDA Zones 3–7	
developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria	

Images by Elaine Mills, U.S. National Arboretum



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