

Take a closer look at... FERNS

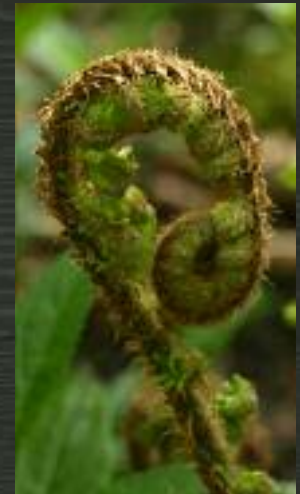
Ferns are ancient plants and fossil ferns have been found in rocks over 300 million years old. Dead ferns helped make coal and oil - millions of years ago they became buried underground and very gradually turned to coal under the immense pressure of the Earth.

Fern leaves are called fronds. When new they are curled up in a tight coil, but they gradually uncurl over time. In the summer look at the underside of a fern frond - the brown dots hold the spores, from which new plants eventually grow.

- Some ferns are tiny, with mossy leaves just 1 cm long, but rare tropical tree ferns can grow up to 25 m tall.
- Ferns can absorb heavy metals from the air and soil. They can be used to clean up polluted areas.
- One species of fern - bracken - can smother hillsides. Now bracken is being turned into compost and fuel for fires - helping wildlife and local economies.
- Many ferns from tropical rain forests only grow on other plants. They collect water from the damp air or from rainfall - these are called epiphytes.
- In the past the spores of some ferns provided flash powder in early photography, since they could be easily ignited.



Fern frond



Curled frond



Sori with spores

Photos © British Pteridological Society

Use the [British Pteridological Society's guide](#) to find out more about ferns and the [Council's website](#) for more on Carmarthenshire's amazing wildlife.



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