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Plant of the month: Bracken *Pteridium esculentum*



Bracken, or Austral Bracken *Pteridium esculentum* is a robust native fern with rigidly erect fronds, spreading from a vigorous rhizome or underground stem. It grows up to 2.5 metres high, with dark green, triangular shaped fronds that are tripinnate, or divided three times. Sori or reproductive spore clusters are held on the underside of the fronds. Bracken is the most common and widespread fern in eastern Australia, often dominating the understorey in forests and woodlands. It is an aggressive coloniser of disturbed areas and is stimulated by fire. It is naturally occurring in areas of Venus Bay and Tarwin Lower.

Bracken grows in full sun or part shade in most well drained soils. The young fronds of Bracken contain a nerve toxin that is dangerous to humans and to stock, however the starchy rhizomes were roasted and eaten by Aborigines. The juice from young frond tips eases the pain from insect bites.

The genus *Pteridium* (pronounced Ter-id-ee-um) belongs in the Dennstaedtiaceae family and comes from the Greek *ptēris* for wing or feather. The species name *esculentum* means edible, even though parts of the plant can be poisonous.

For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.

