



***Onoclea sensibilis* – Sensitive Fern**

COMMON NAME: Sensitive Fern

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Onoclea sensibilis* The genus *Onoclea* has only one member in the eastern United States. The name comes of the Greek *onos* meaning vessel and *kleiein* meaning to close referring to the sori enclosed in the rolled margins. Fossils of this fern have been found dating back 60 million years.

REPRODUCTION: The fertile frond develops in mid to late summer and remains throughout the winter. Division should be in the early spring, but be careful of the roots as they are not very strong.

SIZE: Medium sized, 2 to 3 feet tall.

BEHAVIOR: With ample moisture this is a weedy fern. The roots are pencil-thick and branch or creep on or near the surface of the soil. The name “sensitive” comes from its intolerance to drought and direct sunlight. The fronds also quickly die back after the first frost. The soil surface around these ferns can be lumpy and irregular.

SITE REQUIREMENTS: Found in many locations, but thrives in mucky, wet soil. It is most often found in very wet habitats and the wet woods along streams and rivers. Full shading is important.

SPECIAL FEATURES: The bright green fronds are distinctive with leathery leaflets and netted veins. The central stalk (rachis) is “winged” and the margins of the leaflets roll downward.

NATURAL RANGE: Found throughout Wisconsin, Eastern Canada to Manitoba, south to Florida and east Texas.

SUGGESTED CARE: Easy to grow providing it has ample water. More water encourages spreading and less water discourages the spreading. Tolerates some sunlight.

COMPANION PLANTS: In marshes it is found with bluejoint grass, tussock sedge, water hemlock, marsh shield fern, wild iris and water parsnip. In fens it is with marsh marigold, spotted Joe-pye weed, boneset, Turk’s cap lily, cowbane, mountain mint swam goldenrod Riddell’s goldenrod and skunk cabbage. In boggy woodland with Canada Mayflower, cinnamon fern, royal fern and smooth white violet. In moist parts of rich woods with wild geranium, black cherry, choke cherry, red oak, common elderberry and Solomon’s plume.