

Common urban wall ferns

Because of their microscopic airborne spores, ferns can grow in many unusual places. A wide range of species that naturally occur on rocky habitats can be found in British towns and cities, particularly in damp and sheltered crevices in walls. This guide illustrates the most commonly found wall ferns. By submitting records of ferns that you see (species name, where, when, and a photo) to f.rumsey@nhm.ac.uk, you can help us to monitor changes in the urban flora.

ID hints. The shapes and division of the fronds are characteristic: are they hairy and/or scaly, and what colour are the scales and stalks? Although size can be important, many plants on walls will be young or stunted and may not be entirely typical in appearance. Look for fertile fronds, with brownish patches formed of sporing structures on the underside, as these are easier to identify.

Hart's-tongue

Asplenium scolopendrium

Very distinctive and probably the commonest wall species. The entire strap-like frond shape is unique amongst British ferns.



Rustyback

Asplenium ceterach

Wavy, once divided fronds. Its brownish-red, very scaly under-surface makes this fairly small fern easy to recognise. Fronds are up to 20 cm long.



Wall-rue

Asplenium ruta-muraria

A small delicate plant. The cluster of rather randomly divided fronds are made up of wedge-shaped divisions. Fronds are up to 10 cm long.



Black Spleenwort

Asplenium adiantum-nigrum

The triangular, twice or three times divided fronds, are usually quite glossy and a little leathery. The stalk is blackish-brown below and a bit swollen at its base. Fronds are up to 20 cm long.



Maidenhair Spleenwort

Asplenium trichomanes subsp. *quadrivalens*

The leaf stalk is blackish-brown. The once-divided pinnate fronds have rather rectangular leaflets that are attached at their bottom corner. Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*) is similar but has a green leafstalk, and is an upland plant, rarely found on lowland walls.



Male Fern

Dryopteris filix-mas

A common woodland species rarely reaching maturity on walls. The fronds are twice divided, with toothed edges. The developing spores are protected by greyish kidney-shaped coverings (indusia), neatly arranged on the underside of each frond. The stalk is quite scaly, with beige-brown scales. Fronds may be more than 30 cm long.



Bracken

Pteridium aquilinum

Usually only found as young plants on damp masonry. The fronds are highly divided (3 or more times), and are uniquely very hairy as they unfurl. Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*) also has a triangular much-divided frond, but the fronds are arranged like a shuttlecock and are hairless.



Western Polypody

Polypodium interjectum

There are 3 British species of *Polypodium*, but this is by far the commonest in our towns. The once divided fronds arise at intervals from the thick, scaly, creeping 'root' (rhizome). Leaflets are widest where they attach to the 'stalk' (rachis).



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