

March 2013 *Guess that Plant*



***Onoclea sensibilis* L. Sensitive Fern**

The March *Guess that Plant* was one of New Jersey's most abundant and widespread ferns, the sensitive fern. Sensitive fern is common in all New Jersey counties and is only infrequent in the heart of the Pine Barrens. *Onoclea* resembles the chain ferns and is often confused with netted chain fern. The light blue green color and finer texture should be easy characteristics to separate the two plants. Sensitive fern's name is derived from its early fall die back, a character employed by the plant to save its fragile leaves from an early frost. The photo shows its fruiting stems, born on separate stalks or rachis from the vegetative rachis. The fertile rachis is visible throughout the year.

The sensitive fern is a wetland plant (FACW) and is often a telltale plant used by a wetland delineator as a boundary species. It will grow up to and many times into the uplands a short distance, providing a visual clue as to where the one hydrological system starts and the other ends.

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