

June 2019 Plant of the Month



Asplenium trichomanes L., Maidenhair Spleenwort

June 2019's **Plant of the Month** is one of northern New Jersey's most widespread ferns, the maidenhair spleenwort. The fern has a circumboreal distribution, with its New Jersey stronghold on the rocky ledges and cliff faces of Northern New Jersey. Mary Hough (1983) indicates recent specimens have been collected from most of our northern counties. Montgomery and Fairbrothers (New Jersey Ferns, 1992) described Maidenhair Spleenwort as frequent in the northwestern counties, with its eastern populations disrupted by trap rock mining.

Jim Montgomery's description of the fern's genetic variability is insightful for field identifications of the various races of Maidenhair Fern. There are two chromosome races ($n=72$ and $n=144$) in our state, and the differences are visible as field characteristics. The tetraploid race occurs on calcareous rocks and has a thicker and blacker stipe. The pinnae are crowded and mostly opposite. The diploid race has less dense and thick pinnae, and its stipe has a more coppery color. The race in the photo (under Rt. 78 Bridge, Phillipsburg) is the tetraploid race.

Eastern Native Americans used this fern as a medicine. Records exist from the Cherokee that the Maidenhair Fern was used as an abortifacient and as a breast treatment. An infusion from this fern was used as a cough remedy (Moerman, 1998).

This fern is visible year round, but its distribution on rocky faces and cliff sides limits our searches to those counties along the Delaware River, and rocky outcrops east to the Hudson River.

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