

Matteuccia struthiopteris (L.) Tod.

Ostrich Fern or Shuttlecock Fern

Family: Onocleaceae

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Palaeontological finds have shown that Pteridophyta are the oldest vascular plants in existence. When Angiosperms first appeared in the Cretaceous, Pteridophyta began to decline, with the exception of the ferns, which continued to develop.

The name of the genus is dedicated to Carlo Matteucci, a famous Italian physicist, politician and Professor at Pisa University, while the specific name derives from the Latin *struthio*=ostrich and the Greek *pterus*=wing/feather, referring to the **light fronds similar to ostrich feathers**.



(Photo Daniel Strauch, Fotolia)

It is a perennial, small sized plant

with woody stalks, a robust rhizome and long **underground stolons**. These are special stems which grow at the soil surface and form buds capable of growing their own roots, thereby creating new plants, allowing the species to spread widely and rapidly.

There are **two types of leaves**, which are known as fronds: sterile or fertile. The first type are on the outside of the plant, they are light green, soft, erect and they fall in autumn. The second type are internal, they bud late and therefore live through the winter, and they are shorter and darker than the sterile fronds.

Like most ferns, this plant prefers a moist, **shady environment rich in humus**, protected by walls or other plants. If the setting is right, it will expand its underground stems and create large and invading colonies.

The species is **very ornamental**, and is often cultivated in gardens. In the US, the sprouts are harvested when they grow to 6-10 cm long, boiled and eaten in a variety of ways.