

Ferns for survival

Ferns played an important part in the lives of Māori and early European settlers. Here are a few ways in which people used and continue to use ferns.

Note: With much of our native bush already under threat from introduced animals, please do not gather ferns from the wild and nor should you actually eat any of the recommended fern species. One website on New Zealand wild foods says that, of the 312 varieties of pikopiko fern, only 7 are edible. If you don't know what you are picking, don't eat it!

Ferns to use for shelter/storage

- Whekī-ponga (*Dicksonia fibrosa*) – split the trunks to make rodent-proof food storage boxes. The tough fibres make it difficult for rodents to chew through.
- Silver fern/ponga (*Cyathea dealbata*) – fronds make soft matting for sitting or sleeping on the ground (place silver side down if the fronds have spores). Use the trunks to build hut walls.
- Hen and chickens fern (*Asplenium bulbiferum*) – fronds make soft matting/blankets.
- Fronds of most tree ferns can be used as walls/roofs for bivouacs. Place with the tips of the fronds down so rain water channels down the fronds

Ferns to use as food sources

- Hound's tongue fern (*Phymatosorus pustulatum*) – young fronds baked/steamed as greens.
- Palm leaf fern/cape fern (*Blechnum novae-zelandiae*) – fiddleheads can be eaten, fronds can be wrapped around vegetables to be baked/steamed.
- Gully fern (*Pneumatopteris penningera*) – fiddleheads can be eaten, fronds can be wrapped around vegetables to be baked/steamed and add flavouring.
- Rereti (*Blechnum chambersii*) – young fronds can be steamed and eaten.
- Male fern (*Dropteris filix-mas*) – fiddleheads can be boiled.
- Hen and chickens fern (*Asplenium bulbiferum*) – fiddleheads can be boiled.
- Prickly shield fern (*Polystichum vestitum*) – fiddleheads can be boiled.
- Common shield fern (*Polystichum richardii*) – fiddleheads can be boiled.
- King fern (*Marattia salicina*) – rhizome can be cooked and eaten like potatoes.

Ferns to use for marking tracks

- Crown fern (*Blechnum discolor*) – fronds have pale undersides that are visible even at night. Bend them over as track markers. Alternatively, cut the frond and point the tip to indicate direction.

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