

“Ferns and Fern Allies of Saskatchewan”

Review by Sandy Bonny

This book provides a keyed guide to the ferns and fern allies (quillworts, club-mosses, spike-mosses and horsetails) of Saskatchewan—a boon to medicinal herbalists, fiddlehead gourmets, and environmentalists interested in the identification and preservation of rare plants and their habitats. *Ferns and Fern Allies of Saskatchewan* includes 58 species from all parts of the province; several are rare or endangered but many are pervasive species that will be familiar to local readers. A first flip through the book brought waves of nostalgia for afternoons spent pulling apart the black banded segments of the hollow green stalks of *Equisetum hyemale*, Common Scouring Rush, on the banks of the South Saskatchewan. There was also a moment of revelation: those strange brown pillars that waved above the moss beds we hid in playing ‘flags in the woods’ at summer camp were cones, the fruiting bodies of *Lycopodium lagopus*, Running Club Moss. The ferns that my husband and I struggle to keep from taking over our shaded urban yard belong to *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, the Ostrich Ferns, and I was pleased to learn that their fiddleheads are edible—next spring we will not only dig the outliers out, but boil them lightly in salted water and make a meal of them.

Detailed line drawings, distribution maps, and plain-language descriptions complemented by an extensive botanical glossary will make identification of these unique plants accessible to amateur naturalists throughout our varied eco-zones, and the book has been thoughtfully made field ready with a weatherproof cover complete with a built in metric scale. While too complex for use by children, teachers or parents could make a fun exercise of adapting the keys to local environments and introducing children to the names and parts of the plants that they are probably far more familiar with than their elders. Ferns and fern allies creep beneath prairie grasses that hide snakes and gopher holes, blanket the low shores where frogs hide, and provide some of the best ‘hide and seek’ and flags cover in our boreal forests. This book is a first installment in the soon to be completed multi-volume “Flora of Saskatchewan” and its quality and comprehensive attention to detail promise a treat to come.