

# Western Bracken Fern, *Pteridium aquilinum*



**Identification:** Perennial solitary ferns up to three meters tall. Creeping rhizomes, leather fronds and densely hairy on the underside. Brown spores on the underside of frond segments. New growth emerges as fiddleheads

**Habitat:** Open woods, roadsides, burned areas, prefers neutral to acidic soil

**Animals Affected:** Primarily horses, also cows and sheep

**Toxin Family:** Thiaminase, ptaquiloside

**Other:** Thiaminase causes thiamin deficiency in horses and pigs. Animals must eat large quantities and the deficiency is characterized by central nervous system depression. Ptaquiloside is a carcinogenic and bone marrow depressant norsesquiterpene glycoside affecting cows and sometimes sheep. Newly emerging fiddleheads are especially toxic and palatable, but animals must eat their weight over several months for disease to develop. Consumption over long periods will cause carcinogenic tumors in the bladder and other parts of the digestive tract. Bracken fern can also cause retinal degeneration and blindness in sheep. Toxins remain in hay and silage. All parts poisonous, root stock especially