

Fern — Qaataq

QAATANEK PISURCIQUKUK. – WE (TWO) WILL GATHER FERNS.



Photo: Fern frond, collected in the Old Harbor area, Kodiak Island Alaska.

The spreading wood fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*) is one of at least nine varieties of ferns commonly found in the Kodiak Archipelago. This large fern, which thrives in moist forests and coastal meadows throughout the north, can often be found growing near sourdock and nettle plants. The spreading wood fern has dense, triangular fronds that can reach over a foot in length. When it first sprouts in late April and May, the fronds appear as tightly curled fiddleheads. These tender shoots are both delicious and nutritious.

Alutiiq people collect fiddleheads for food. People prepare the young fronds by boiling or steaming and then eat them as a vegetable. They can also be added to salads. Fiddleheads are best consumed in the early spring when they are less than six inches tall because the fern develops a bitter taste as it grows and unfurls. In fall, people collect the tender, juicy, buried portion of fern stems, which can be roasted. Both of these edible parts of the fern can be canned, dried, or boiled and stored until needed.