

(revision date:9/3/2015)

## **Weeds: Brackenfern, western(*Pteridium aquilinum*)**

family: *Dennstaedtiaceae* (*Polypodiaceae*)

cycle *Perennial*

plant type: *Other*

**Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for successful plant problem management.**

### ***Biology***

Brackenfern grows from creeping rhizomes, which can spread the plant over a large area. The hairy rhizomes are brown and woody. Leaves (fronds) are generally triangular in outline and are more branched near the base. The leaf stalk is velvety brown near the base. New leaves have a "fiddle-neck" or coiled appearance as they emerge. The overall appearance is of a feathery, ferny plant growing up to six feet tall in good conditions. Brackenfern spreads by both creeping rhizomes and by spores, which are produced on the underside of the frond segments and are protected by the rolled leaf margin. Fronds turn brown in the fall and may persist through the winter.

Special information: Brackenfern is considered toxic, especially to livestock which may be poisoned by grazing the plants or by eating contaminated hay.

### ***Habitat***

Brackenfern is found in a variety of sites in sun to partial shade and on soils that range from deep and rich to hard-packed or sandy. It is one of the first plants to colonize logged or cleared areas. It seldom persists in cultivated areas.

### ***Management Options***

#### **Non-Chemical Management**

~ Digging and carefully removing all rhizomes will effectively eliminate single plants and small infestations.

***Select non-chemical management options as your first choice!***

#### **Chemical Management**

***IMPORTANT: Visit Home and Garden Fact Sheets for more information on using pesticides***

Not a problem in healthy established turf. Chemical (herbicidal) control of this weed is very difficult. Persistent physical destruction is the most successful management method for brackenfern. Glyphosate products should be applied as spot treatments only! NOTE: Some ingredients listed here are only available in combination. Read the label carefully on combination products to make sure the product is suitable for your specific situation.

Landscape Areas

- glyphosate

Turf Areas

Bare Ground Areas

- glyphosate

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**Images**



~ Caption: Western brackenfern fronds  
~ Photo by: R. Parker



~ Caption: Western brackenfern "fiddleheads"  
~ Photo by: C.R. Foss



~ Caption: Western brackenfern fronds late in  
growth season  
~ Photo by: J.A. Kropf