

Sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*)

A vigorous shrub, 2 to 4' x 4 to 8' (or indefinite spread over time, if desired); forms a broad rounded outline.

CT native, most often occurring in poor, acidic, sandy or gravelly, infertile soils, in barrens, rocky summits, woods, fields, clearings.

4" narrow, lustrous, deeply notched, olive-green leaves. Sweetly aromatic foliage looks ferny, giving a graceful woody appearance.

Leaves rusty red in fall, crispy ruddy-brown in winter.

Slender upright shiny stems. Old stems copper/purplish.

Yellowish-green April-May catkin flowers.

Fruits are greenish brown nutlets.

Full sun to part shade.

Adaptable, prefers sandy acidic loams, low fertility, but tolerates wet or dry soil, wind. Fixes its own nitrogen. Easily grown, low maintenance. Once established, it can spread rapidly to form colonies (though transplanting from colonies is difficult).

Use for its aromatic foliage, for ground-cover, for native plant/natural areas where it can be left alone to colonize, for areas with poor soils, on difficult sites, slopes and banks. Can make tea with dried leaves.

Attracts birds and butterflies; supports larvae of several butterflies/moths, including the Gray Hairstreak. Good low cover for wildlife.

Photos 1, 6 UConn Plant Database
hort.uconn.edu/

Photos 2, 8 North Central Conservation District

Photos 3, 4 MO Botanic Garden Plant Database
missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx

Photo 5 Brandeis University, Taste of the Wild: A Guide to Edible Plants and Fungi of New England
bio.brandeis.edu/fieldbio/Edible_Plants_Ramer_Silver_Weizmann/Pages/spp_page_sweetfern.html

Photo 7 Berlin Botanical Garden;

Nov. 2005 User:BotBln;
commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comptonia_peregrina_BotGardBln1105HabitusFall.JPG#filehistory

