

# Native Plant Spotlight by Krys Kirkwood

## **Polypodium glycyrrhiza – licorice fern**



This is a small to medium-sized, evergreen fern that grows from a creeping reddish-brown, scaly, licorice-flavored rhizome. It can be found growing on deciduous tree trunks and branches, moss covered boulders; even moss covered stone structures (bridges, etc.). Licorice fern likes moist, mossy ground, logs and rocks (sometimes forms large sheets over rock slabs), at low elevations. There are other ferns in the genus Polypodium that are similar; some do not have rhizomes that are licorice- flavored. The sweet, licorice-flavored rhizomes were chewed for the flavor by some of the native peoples. Occasionally the rhizomes

were dried, steamed, scorched or eaten raw. The rhizomes were an important medicine for colds and sore throats. They were also mixed with bitter medicines as a sweetener.

*I strongly urge leaving any of our native plants undisturbed. Enjoy them in their natural environment. Seek out nurseries and professionals who sell and/or deal with natives if you want to add any to your garden.*

- Photos: Krys Kirkwood
- Reference: Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast by Pojar and Mackinnon  
Wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest by Mark Turner and Phyllis Gustafson