

Pteris cretica

COMMON NAME

Cretan brake

FAMILY

Pteridaceae

AUTHORITY

Pteris cretica L.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

DISTRIBUTION

Naturalised. New Zealand: North and South Islands (widespread from Whangarei south to Banks Peninsula). Indigenous to the warm-temperate and tropical parts of the Old World.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane (mostly coastal to lowland). A common weedy fern in many urban parts of New Zealand but also common in less modified areas growing in dense forest, along river, stream and gully banks, on track and roadside cuttings. It can be very common in wasteland areas within cities and towns, and often appears on retaining walls, and even under houses (provided there is some light).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Large terrestrial fern. **Rhizome** short-creeping; scales minute, dark brown. **Fronds** dimorphic, clustered. **Stipes** 0.25–0.9 m long, yellow-brown, glabrous. **Lamina** 0.2–0.6 × 0.1–0.4 m, dark green (occasionally variegated) broadly oblong to oblong, 1-pinnate, often incompletely 2-pinnate (forked) at the base; primary pinnae in 2–7 widely spaced pairs, somewhat ascending, narrowly lanceolate, linear to linear-falcate, tapering to apices and long-acuminate with smooth or minutely denticulate margins, chartaceous, glabrous; rachis not winged or slightly winged at apex. **Lower pinnae** short-stalked, in mature plants with 1–3 posterior short-stalked free conform pinnules. **Upper pinnae** sessile, uppermost adnate to rachis. **Terminal pinna** slightly contracted; apex of sterile pinna, sharply dentate. **Veins** free, simply or once-forked; false veins absent. **Sori** continuous; indusium subentire; paraphyses numerous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from all indigenous and naturalised *Pteris* except *P. pacifica* by the 1-pinnate fronds bearing long, narrow-lanceolate, linear to linear-falcate pinnae, with the basal few pairs often forked. From the very uncommon *P. pacifica*, *P. cretica* is readily distinguished by the typically dark green rather than yellow-green fronds, and by the distal portion of the sterile pinnae margins sharply dentate. *Pteris cretica* could be confused with *P. vittata* however that species has a much narrower frond, with a distinctly longer terminal pinna, and by the pinnae which are never forked and which reduce in size toward the frond base.



Pteris cretica. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Pteris cretica. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Pteris cretica is commonly cultivated and exists in a diverse range of forms which include the usually dark green plants, as well as variegated ones and those whose pinnae apices are much divided (i.e. "crested"). It is an aggressive fern that rapidly spreads and probably should not be cultivated anymore as it rapidly spreads from garden environments into indigenous habitats, especially coastal and lowland forest, along river, stream, and gully sides, and even wetlands. *Pteris cretica* is remarkably tolerant of a range of conditions but does best when planted in a semi-shaded to shaded site in a deep, humus enriched, moist soil.

YEAR NATURALISED

1881

ORIGIN

Tropics and temperate regions

ETYMOLOGY

pteris: A fern known to the ancient Greeks; from the Greek pteris

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared for NZPCN by: P.J. de Lange (18 January 2012). Description adapted from Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth (2000) and Kramer & McCarthy (1998).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Brownsey PJ, Smith-Dodsworth JC. 2000. New Zealand Ferns and Allied Plants. David Bateman, Auckland, NZ. 168 p.

Kramer KU, McCarthy PM. 1998. Pteridaceae. *Flora of Australia 48, Ferns Gymnosperms and allied groups*: 241–248. ABRS/CSIRO Victoria, Australia.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pteris-cretica/>