

There is a fern that has appeared, out of the blue so to speak, within this century. I dare predict that it will occur in every Louisiana parish by the end of the century. This fern is, of course, *Thelypteris torresiana*. It has been found in most of the counties of Arkansas in the Western Gulf Coastal Plain to the outskirts of Little Rock.

The older fern guides do not mention it. In doing a bit of research for this article, [I found] Dr. John W. Thieret's, *Louisiana Fern and Fern Allies* says that it was found in 1967 in Louisiana. The specific epithet is *torresiana* from Luis de Torres. He uses the common name "Torres' Fern" instead of "Mariana Fern." It was first described from the Mariana Islands in the tropical South Pacific. It is much hardier than an origin such as the Mariana Islands would suggest. In this country, it was first found in Florida in 1906. Since then, it has become a firmly entrenched species in the Southeastern Flora. Hopefully, it won't become as weedy in Louisiana as the Japanese climbing fern, *Lygodium japonicum*, which is found in every parish in Louisiana. In spite of its weediness, it is so unique and desirable it is widely cultivated. Thieret lists *T. torresiana* as growing naturally in nineteen parishes. His book was published in 1980. Dr. Dale Thomas in his Volume I of *Atlas of the Vascular Flora of Louisiana* (with Dr. Charles M. Allen) enlarges the range to 24 parishes. This was published in 1993. The fern is spreading its range.

In the garden, it is a beautiful fern. I have heard it said that "it is the most beautiful" to "one of the finest." At this time, everyone agrees that it is garden worthy. In response to all inquiries about, no one has lost their garden plants due to last summer's drought or the severe winter blasts.

It was a bit late in coming into foliage in the spring. It has 3-pinnate fronds that are constantly growing from unfurling fiddleheads all during the growing season. The fronds are a bright light yellowish-green. The structure of the entire plant calls to my mind as a miniature tree fern. Heights can vary from at least 24 inches to 30 inches tall and almost as wide. It is tall and airy in its grace. This fern grows well in acidic sandy soils in just ordinary loam, especially in disturbed areas.

That brings up my first encounter with the fern. On a field trip in southern Ashley County, Arkansas about 10 years ago, I was taken to see if I could identify a "rare" fern. The plants were growing in a moist area at the edge of the bridge abutment. It was perhaps six feet below the bridge, on the lower side of a blackberry patch. To get a better view, I walked on the bridge and stepped off the central runners that ran the length of the bridge. When I did, the rotten boards of the bridge flooring fell under my weight, leaving me dangling by the armpits. Fortunately, no one was hurt; the bridge remained passable, and everyone had a good laugh. The sight of the fern left a lingering image. Somewhere I had seen that fern. Later, I found out where. When my brothers and I settled up the estate, some log haulers hauled out some logs and in so doing, a small area was badly disturbed. Some fern sporelings that I could not identify came up in the area. These were *Thelypteris torresiana* plants coming into size large enough to be identified. Some plants remain in the area to this day. The area is a bit drier than where Royal Fern and Cinnamon Fern would grow. There is no greater thrill than finding a new plant and especially so when it is on your property. I have found it to be easily transplanted and I have shared many plants to interested friends. It remains lovely until the above-ground parts are killed by frosts. It is not an evergreen fern, but I rate it as a leading fern for the garden.

As a footnote to my experiences with *Thelypteris torresiana*, we must all adapt to changes in scientific names. David L. Jones' book, *Encyclopaedia of Ferns*, printed in Australia, where Jones lives and works, uses the name *Macrothelypteris torresiana* for this fern. Never a dull moment in the study of botany! Carl Amason is a superior plantsman who gardens near Calion, Ark.