

4. Tree ferns

Mamaku



Ponga



Wheki



Katote



Whekiponga



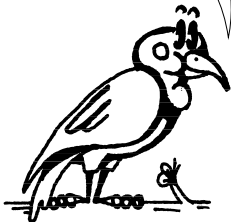
Photos: Jeremy Rolfe

4. Tree ferns

Ferns are a special feature of our New Zealand bush. Ancestors of modern ferns were the main vegetation on Gondwanaland 200 million years ago. Look out for the ferns below.

Mamaku	Ponga	Wheki	Katote	Whekiponga
The stem of the frond (stipe) is thick and black.	The underside of the frond is silvery-white to creamy yellow.	The dark green frond feels rough to touch.	The light green frond feels soft to touch.	The base of the frond is thin and green with matted brown hairs.
Dead fronds hanging below the green fronds make an untidy mass.	The fronds continue down the trunk (caudex).	Wheki are often found in groups as they can reproduce from runners spreading from the parent.	The midribs of dead fronds form a tidy skirt below the green fronds.	The whole dead fronds form a tidy skirt.
The mamaku is the tallest and grandest tree fern.		Dead fronds hang messily below the green fronds.		

There are more than 200 different types of ferns growing in New Zealand—some are very small and some become trees.



- Find one example of each tree fern described above.
- Where do you find each type? Is there a pattern?
- Describe the conditions that the tree ferns seem to prefer.
- Do you know (or can you guess) which parts of the tree ferns can be used for food? shelter?