

Ferns

Tree fern / *Cyathea lepifera* / Hikagehego / ヒカゲヘゴ

Although these ferns have an almost prehistoric appearance, they are a relatively new member of the fern family, first appearing around 100 million years ago. The largest fern species in Japan, they are native to Amami-Oshima and a few neighboring islands. Their slender trunks can reach heights of 10 meters, and they usually grow in spots where the ground stays moist but gets plenty of light, such as the shoulders of forest roads. Yellowish-green fronds, some up to 3 meters long, radiate from the trunk at the crown. When the fronds fall, they leave oval scars in an attractive pattern on the trunk, hence the scientific name *lepifera*, which refers to plants with “scales.”

Bird’s nest fern / *Asplenium nidus* / Shima-otaniwatari / シマオオタニワタリ

This fern is what is known as an epiphyte, a plant that grows on rocks or the bark of trees. It is native to most of East Asia, and on Amami-Oshima it is mainly found on the rough trunks of the chinquapin oak and Amami ring-cup oak. It grows up to 2 meters wide, and has long bright-green leaves that spread gracefully from the center. The cup-like arrangement of the fern’s leaves catches water as well as falling leaves, which decompose and provide nourishment for the plant.