

Climbing Maidenhair Fern

Robyn Howard

One of the attractive and interesting plants which may be seen while walking on the boardwalk at the Sanctuary is the Climbing Maidenhair (*Lygodium microphyllum*). It enjoys moist, shady positions so is found in the Melaleuca swamp areas.

It is a climbing fern which clings well on the sides of the paperbarks, and although it has the ability to climb to a greater height, most plants visible from the boardwalk do not go much higher than four metres. The differing shapes of the leaves is fascinating. The unfertile leaves tend to be almost triangular in shape, with the fertile leaves having many small extensions on the edge of the leaf. These extensions carry the spore on the back. Of course, ferns do not flower and propagate through spore dispersal.

Aboriginals were able to make a “string” by twining several of the long stalks together.

Climbing Maidenhair is not an Australian endemic. It occupies suitable parts of the Northern Territory, Queensland coastal areas and into NE NSW, but is also widespread through South East Asia, some Pacific Islands, and tropical Africa. It was introduced into Florida, USA, where it has become a pest species. As beautiful as it is in its natural environment, like many of our weed species, it has become rampant without its natural enemies and is now a weed in USA. Investigations of its natural pests in Australia were conducted in the hope of introducing biological controls in Florida. Heat and dry conditions in the sanctuary are more likely to cause the death of plants rather than their natural pests – various mites, leaf beetles, thrips, mealybugs and sawflies.

For a couple of years, beside the old boardwalk below the rainforest, a Brown Cuckoo-Dove chose to build her insubstantial nest not much above eye-level in a dense Climbing Maidenhair. Strangely, most visitors did not notice her!

