



Growing Tree Ferns

The only tree fern that is readily available in the UK is *Dicksonia antarctica*. It is usually supplied as lengths of felled trunks that have been sterilised and shipped in containers half-way around the world from the antipodes. It is remarkable that it can remain alive with this treatment, but care needs to be taken to ensure that it thrives. Here are a few tips:

1. The trunk has had all the roots that were in the ground removed. However, there are many roots that run down the outside of the trunk from the crown and it is these that will establish a new ground root-system. Before planting, soak the trunk in water for 24 hours. Choose a site that is not in full sun and is protected from wind, preferable in dappled shade. Prepare a hole deep enough to support the tree-fern in the event of a storm.
2. Line the hole with good compost which is moisture retentive and water well before placing the trunk in the hole. Pack compost around this and, if necessary secure the trunk with some 'guy ropes'.
3. Water every day or two when first planted, ensuring that the roots on the trunk are well-wetted. As the weather cools. Continue to water the trunk but avoid wetting the crown of the plant. While there is any sign of life in the plant during the winter, with the fronds remaining green, continue to wet the trunk occasionally. In the spring, winds can be very dry, and it is important to increase the watering then.
4. Tree ferns should be protected in the winter by filling the crown with dry, insulating material such as dead fronds, horticultural fleece or even lamb's wool. Do not use straw as this retains the water and can rot the delicate centre crown. The old fronds, if still green, should be left protruding through this insulation and only be removed if they are dead. The frequent removal of all the fronds in the autumn will weaken the plant and leave an ugly trunk through the winter.