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Guide to Growing Tree Ferns

By David Howlett

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Introduction

Tree ferns have been around since prehistoric times when the dinosaurs roamed the earth. Originally popularised by the Victorians, the tree fern has undergone something of a revival in recent years, helped no doubt by its frequent appearances in many of the television garden makeover programmes.

Varieties of tree ferns to grow in the UK

Tree ferns can roughly be divided in hardy and non hardy when growing in the UK. It is likely there are up to a thousand species of tree fern, with most of them growing in the Southern Hemisphere and the tropics. Many of these are not all cold hardy and it would be very difficult to grow them successfully outside in the UK. The two main cold hardy types for our climate are called: *Cyathea* and *Dicksonia*. The most commonly available of these are: *Cyathea spinulosa*, *Cyathea australis*, *Cyathea dealbeta*, *Dicksonia Antarctica*, *Dicksonia fibrosa* and *Dicksonia squarrosa*.

Different sizes of tree fern and where to buy them

Tree fern are available as plants that have been propagated from spores and complete trunks that have been harvested from rain forests or tropical areas of the world, often as a by-product of other activities. You can usually buy them at garden centres or specialist nurseries. The trunks are often sold without fronds straight from the container and the fronds will start to appear after a few weeks. Expect to pay more if you want to buy a tree fern with fronds.

Choosing a position for a tree fern

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Tree ferns prefer to grow with some shade. They will adapt to a sunny position but will need very regular watering and may suffer from sunburn to the fronds. So ideally you need to pick a spot in the garden with some shade during at least part of the day. Ferns also like a moist surrounding and tree ferns really need watering every day during the warmer months especially inside and down the trunk. They will grow equally happy in containers but again will prefer a shady spot.

How to plant tree ferns

Tree ferns don't need a rich or deep soil. They will survive happily even in very poor or stony soil. Ideally a slightly acid soil (adding ericaceous compost will help) is preferable and a light dressing with blood and bone meal will give the plants plenty of food to start them off. If you've purchased a smaller plant just dig a hole big enough for the root ball.

Tree fern trunks will need a hole slightly bigger than the trunk and 4 to 6 inches deep depending on the length of the trunk. Plant them and firm them in but make sure they are upright then the weight of the trunk will keep it stable. After a few weeks it will make its own roots to secure itself.

Feeding the plant

The tree fern will need feeding from time to time. If you have planted it in the shade under a canopy of larger tree your tree fern will extract some nutrients from the decaying leaf-fall. They will still need some extra feed and one of the best around is one called Maxi Crop. Maxi Crop is made from seaweed; it is easily available and contains a good range of nutrients and minerals. Follow the manufactures instructions for the dilution and feed well at least every two months.

Surviving the winter

Generally Cyathea and Dicksonia are the hardiest of the most commonly available tree ferns. They are naturally evergreen and should survive quite happily through a normal winter. Before the worst of the winter starts you will need to place a wedge of straw down the centre of the plant (where the fronds grow from) to keep the worst of the frost out.

David Howlett co-runs a gardening website called

they have just

started a range of Jeep Wheelbarrows supplied direct to UK gardeners.

Gardening With Ferns

By Jena Luthovski

Homeowners with wooded backyards choose ferns for their attractive undergrowth. There are many assortments to choose from. Thousands of varieties of ferns can be found all over the globe. Sizes range from a few inches to as much as 60–feet–tall.

Fern plants thrive and grow in woodlands all over the United States. These eye–catching plants are just as comfortable in the shaded areas of the splendor in the yard. You can place them in areas of little or even no direct sunlight, where little else will cultivate and grow.

It's mostly up to you when it comes to flower garden design. It's definitely important to do your best job in soil preparation as you carefully match certain plants to the location. Ignoring these principles will only result in a disheartening, time–consuming experience.

The aesthetics are simply of a personal preference. A formal appearance, for example, with plants in orderly garden planting and straight edged beds of fern may be your cup of tea. Maybe you'd be more content with an even more natural appearance with uneven plant clumps and extensive curves.

Established fern plants are simple to cultivate. They are versatile, as well—you can plant them singly or in clusters. You can use them as border edgings, along wooded regions, alongside the front of your house and in rock gardens. You can even try them in containers and use them as indoor houseplants.

While there may be thousands of assortments of ferns, several are on their way to becoming endangered species.

Some ferns are poisonous, so unless you know the variety you have is absolutely safe, it's advisable to keep children and pets away from these ferns.

Ferns, not unlike mushrooms, produce spores. Spores develop on the underside of the leaves, as millions are produced. Only a few successfully land in a place that's suitable to nurture, take root and cultivate. Ferns also grow by scattering their underground roots.

Ferns plants grow rather slowly. Established plants live for years, as most people buy ferns from garden nurseries or even on the Internet.

You can select a location with partial to full shade. Ferns like soil that is fertile in organic matter. You can add plenty compost at time of planting. It's suggested that you keep the soil moist at all times.

Established fern plants should bloom for years with little or no attention. It's wise to mulch around the plants each spring season to help preserve moisture, and to reload organic matter around the plant. Finally, let the plant cultivate naturally, once you remove dead or wilted fronds.

Jena Luthovski writes about

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