

Caring for your Soft Tree Fern

Older, "recycled" Tree Ferns have proved hardier than young plants that have recently been raised from spores. Nevertheless, protect vulnerable developing fronds from sharp spring frosts (between Feb-April) with a handful of straw or bracken placed in the top of the stem.

Dicksonia originates from acid woodland, so mimic these conditions as closely as possible for success. Avoid alkaline conditions, strong sunlight, windy exposed positions or draughty corners. When growing tree ferns in containers, use a lime-free Ericaceous Compost.

The delicate fronds are designed to flourish in humid conditions so special attention must be paid to moisture levels all year round. In hot, dry periods, soak the root ball and spray the foliage and the fibrous trunk regularly. Throughout the rest of the year, ensure the fern is watered thoroughly through the centre of the stem, as they absorb moisture more readily this way.

Small leaved deciduous trees provide the perfect protection and setting - the lightly dappled shade they offer is ideal for Tree Ferns. Shade cast by buildings is less desirable as such sites often bring with them the additional problem of draughts.

Tree Ferns are greedy feeders. Fertiliser will improve frond colour and increase vigour. However, they dislike high levels of nitrogen - in preference use an organic mulch of leaf mould, chopped bracken or garden compost, spread thickly on the ground surrounding the stems.

caring for...

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Haskins Ferndown

Longham, Ferndown
Dorset BH22 9DJ
Tel: 01202 591919

Haskins West End

Mansbridge Road, Gaters Hill
West End, Southampton SO18 3HW
Tel: 023 8047 2324

Haskins Roundstone

Roundstone Bypass, Angmering
West Sussex BN16 4BD
Tel: 01903 777666

Haskins Snowhill

Snowhill Lane, Copthorne
West Sussex RH10 3EY
Tel: 01342 712545



Fern frond
uncurling from a
Soft Tree Fern
Dicksonia antarctica



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Soft Tree Ferns

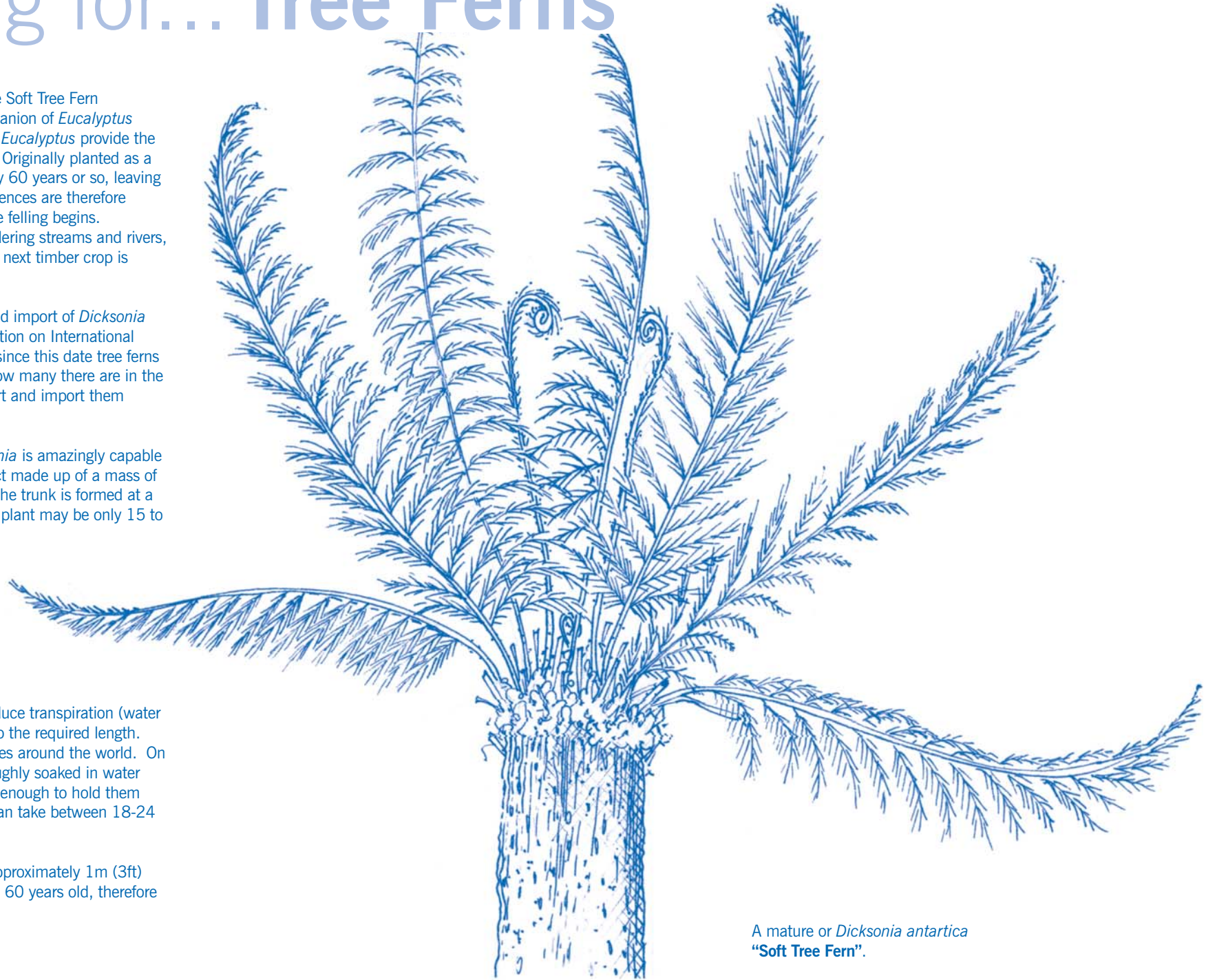
An emigrant from southeast Australia, the Soft Tree Fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) was once the companion of *Eucalyptus* woodland. In its native habitat, towering *Eucalyptus* provide the essential shade for the delicate tree fern. Originally planted as a timber crop, the *Eucalyptus* is felled every 60 years or so, leaving the delicate fern vulnerable. Extraction licences are therefore granted and the ferns removed, before the felling begins. However, large tracts of ferns are left bordering streams and rivers, ensuring speedy re-colonization, once the next timber crop is planted.

Up until January 1st 2001, the export and import of *Dicksonia* was controlled by C.I.T.E.S. - The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. However, since this date tree ferns have been de-restricted, indicating just how many there are in the wild, and it is now perfectly legal to export and import them without a licence.

The spongy, fibrous "trunk" of the *Dicksonia* is amazingly capable of root regeneration. Its structure is in fact made up of a mass of woody roots, built up over many years. The trunk is formed at a rate of 2-3cm per year - so a 10 year old plant may be only 15 to 30cm (6-12") tall.

Once lifted, the fronds are removed to reduce transpiration (water loss) in transit, before the trunk is sawn to the required length. Trunks are packed and shipped to nurseries around the world. On reaching their destination, they are thoroughly soaked in water before being potted into containers, large enough to hold them upright while they send out roots. This can take between 18-24 months.

If you purchase a *Dicksonia* on a trunk approximately 1m (3ft) high, the plant is probably between 50 to 60 years old, therefore the price reflects this.



A mature or *Dicksonia antarctica*
"Soft Tree Fern".