

Tree Fern Care



Dicksonia antarctica wrapped for winter Photo © David Gibson

These handsome ancient plants are a popular attraction in warm gardens, but unfortunately not reliably hardy in the greater Seattle area. *Dicksonia antarctica* is the most cold tolerant of the lot, but all tree ferns need special care and winter protection. Site them in the warmest section of the garden; a shady nook on the south side of the house (away from cold north winds) is ideal. As the roots extend down the trunk, the plants need extra water to transport a steady supply to the foliage. The trunk also needs to be misted or watered periodically. Critical care is especially essential for survival during the winter months. When the plants are young and containerized, the entire plant can be brought inside to the warmth of a greenhouse or suitably comfortable site in filtered light. Once the plant gains height and remains in the ground it will need protection from the cold. A hefty mulch at the base and a simple wrap of burlap or horticultural gauze around the trunk can be sufficient in mild weather. However, in more severe cold the trunk needs greater insulation. Experts use various techniques. One of the easiest is to wrap the trunk in bubble wrap and then cover this with an additional blanket of burlap or similar material. (Bubble wrap alone should not be used as it magnifies sunlight which will burn the plant.) Some gardeners also wrap the fronds which if left exposed will burn and brown in a severe frost. They should be held up vertically, not pulled down, and tied with a loose wrapping. Be advised that the fronds will likely be damaged in the process. Note that all of these precautions should be in place before an arctic blast arrives. Good luck!!