

Why the trade in Tasmanian soft tree ferns is damaging species rich temperate rainforests:

Large specimens of the Tasmanian soft tree fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) are freely and legally available in the UK horticulture trade. These plants are slow-growing temperate rainforest ferns and are likely to be more than 100 years old if they are larger specimens. The trade in wild origin soft tree ferns is legal but decidedly unethical. These plants are a byproduct of logging virgin temperate rainforest in Tasmania, a forest type far rarer than tropical rainforest. The plants have official papers for export, but the truth of their origins is not widely known. This trade provides another incentive for habitat destruction that causes species loss and is driving climate change by releasing carbon stored in forests, particularly in their soils.

Although the UK government has measures aimed at keeping out pests and diseases, it is impossible to be sure that harmful microbes, or other larger pests, are not present in the stems of these imported wild tree ferns. This is simply not a risk we should be taking.

As already pointed out, these tree ferns are from a temperate rainforest habitat. This means they require lots of water to thrive. They can grow well in mild parts of western Britain, where we have our own temperate rainforest, now reduced to about 1 percent of the UK, down from an original cover of about 20 percent. Many places where these tree ferns are planted are not within the British temperate rainforest zone. Many will experience unfavourable hot and dry summers. The only way these ferns will survive is if they are provided with regular and heavy irrigation, which is not sustainable. We often hear of the strain being placed on water supply, particularly in the southeast.

The buying public can help put a stop to this unethical trade by informing retailers, including some well-known household names, of the truth behind the trade in soft tree ferns.