

Tree Fern as a Mounting Platform

Tree fern has been used as a mounting for orchids for a number of years, especially once Osmunda fiber became more and more expensive and difficult to find. We have now reached the point where the demand for the product is endangering many of the slower growing species of this large fern.

As the root mass – which is what we use as mounts – is stripped from wild growing ferns, eventually the plant dies. This is especially true in the case of the South American varieties where it is estimated by some that the majority of species are now endangered. I was able to find some information on sustainable production of tree ferns in plantation form in Australia. And Tasmania has fairly strong governmental regulation of the harvesting of wild ferns. It is only allowed in areas that are being cleared for road building and/or farmland where the ferns would be eliminated anyway. Unfortunately, import of tree fern products from this part of the world is prohibited in the US and Canada so we have no way to buy sustainable product. I was unable to find any source from South America which was marked as plantation raised and not from the wild. If anyone knows of any such source, please let me know and I will pass the information on.

In light of the endangered status of most of the tree ferns, I have stopped using it for any mounting I'm doing. Coconuts, baskets, plaques, cork mounts and [EpiWeb](http://www.firststrays.com/epiweb.htm) (<http://www.firststrays.com/epiweb.htm>) which is a new product made of recycled bottles, are all alternatives which should be considered instead of any kind of tree fern unless you know the source of that product.

Coconut husk pieces are a resource that is simply thrown away now in many tropical areas and they provide an ideal planting and mounting product. Chips are used extensively in culture and the larger pieces are not hard to find at most supply vendors. Cork slabs, which have also been used extensively for years, and are a renewable resource are now becoming scarcer due to a pest which is killing off the cork trees. It is a truly renewable resource and we hope that the pest can be managed so that this mounting medium is available for years to come.

As more and more people move away from tree fern products, we should start seeing more conservation friendly alternatives such as the EpiWeb product produced in many of the shapes that we now see in tree fern. In the meantime, please consider moving to one of the other products in order to reduce the demand for wild harvested ferns.