

Cotswolds and Vale Ash Dieback Forum



ASH DIEBACK

Information for farmers and land managers

What is ash dieback?

Ash dieback is a highly infectious fungal disease originating from East Asia, which is threatening to wipe out our native Ash trees. There is no known cure and no clear method for stopping its spread.

Currently there is a total ban on the movement of both ash seed and trees for planting.

Which trees are affected?

All common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) are susceptible, however a small percentage have shown a tolerance to the disease. Young ash trees are particularly vulnerable and often die quickly once infected (within 5 years). The majority of mature trees are expected to decline and die over a 10-15 year period.

Why is it a concern?

Ash is the third most common tree in Britain and occurs naturally in woodlands and hedgerows across the Cotswolds and Vale. Sadly up to 95% of these ash trees are predicted to be lost over the coming years as a result of the disease. This will have significant impacts on the Cotswolds and Vale landscape and the wildlife supported by the trees.

Due to the high numbers of ash trees along roadsides, there is also a significant Health and Safety and economic implication. FARMERS, OTHER LANDOWNERS AND LAND MANAGERS are responsible for 99% percent of the ash trees within falling distance of highways. The Highways Authority is responsible for only a comparatively small number of trees.

How can I tell if my trees have the disease?

The disease causes leaf loss, erratic growth / dieback within the tree's crown, and lesions where branches join the trunk or around the base. Trees affected by ash dieback also become more susceptible to secondary pathogens including honey fungus which can cause butt or root rot and can speed up the trees becoming hazardous. For further information:

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/pest-and-disease-resources/chalara-ash-dieback-hymenoscyphus-fraxineus/

The best time to survey ash trees for symptoms in the foliage is July-September. This is because once autumn begins, the normal seasonal change in the colour of the leaves can be mistaken for symptoms of the disease.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

- You are not legally required to take any particular action if you own infected ash trees, unless you are served with a Statutory Plant Health Notice. This is unlikely. However, bear in mind your responsibility as a land owner/manager to maintain public safety.
- New cases of the disease in previously unaffected areas should be reported to the Forestry Commission through the Tree Alert service <https://treealert.forestryresearch.gov.uk>
- DO NOT FELL infected trees UNLESS for public safety (or timber production) or planned woodland management. There is evidence that a small proportion will be able to tolerate the disease and recover. Disease resistant trees could be the source of our future ash trees.
- Where appropriate and safe, leave standing dead trees for their high dead-wood value for biodiversity. Leaving high stumps is an alternative approach, reducing risk whilst retaining dead-wood habitat.
- KEEP AN EYE on the trees' safety as the disease progresses and prune or fell them if they or their branches threaten to cause injury or damage. In particular, watch for basal lesions or fungus near the bottom of the trunk which can weaken the tree and make it more likely to fall.
- Bear in mind the need to obtain a FELLING LICENCE from the Forestry Commission before undertaking felling over certain volumes. Any felling near a highway will require liaison with the Highway Authority for your area. Also be aware of the requirements of protected species and their habitats e.g. active bird nests or bat roosts. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-felling-overview>
- Consider pollarding ash trees at breast / head height as an alternative to felling. This way you can prevent an expensive future bill and any costly accidents, whilst keeping the tree's wildlife value. Future management will also be easier and safer.
- Avoid cutting ash-dominated hedgerows during the summer months and during the bird-breeding season, when the spore production from dead leaves on the ground is highest, and disturbance might increase dispersal.
- Establish replacement trees of suitable alternative native species using the 2 for 1 formula, planting 2 trees for a large tree and 1 tree for a medium tree or small tree. When replacing trees outside of woods, position is important to maintain landscape and ecological value.
- Tree shelters from diseased ash plants can be re-used as long as any leaf litter is fully removed and that at least one month has elapsed before moving them.
- Keep tools, boots and equipment clean, particularly if working between infected trees.
- Consider undertaking a Woodland Management Plan to help improve resilience of trees and woodlands across the farm.

Where can I get further information?

The following organisations and links can provide you with further information on Ash Dieback.

Cotswolds and Vale Ash Dieback Forum c/o <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/ash-tree-dieback/>

Forestry Commission <https://www.forestryengland.uk/southwest.fce@forestrycommission.gov.uk>

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