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# ASH DIEBACK DISEASE

# A GUIDE FOR TREE OWNERS



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## THIS GUIDANCE IS FOR YOU IF:

- You are a homeowner or landowner and have trees on your land
- You think you may have ash trees on your land

## THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU TO:

- Understand what ash dieback disease is and its impacts
- Learn to spot ash trees and understand what the signs of ash dieback look like
- Understand your responsibilities
- Understand options for managing affected ash trees
- Understand the value of ash trees and the environmental impact of ash dieback
- Understand the importance of replanting trees where possible and what species to plant

### What is ash dieback disease?

Ash dieback is a highly destructive fungal disease affecting ash trees. It causes leaf loss and canopy decline and in some cases causes the trees to die. The disease was first officially recorded in the UK in 2012 and is now widespread across England, Wales and Scotland.

### Why is it important?

Ash trees are the third most common tree in Britain, present in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens across the country and have much cultural significance in our urban and rural landscapes. They are also valuable habitats for over 1,000 species of wildlife, including a wide range of mammals, birds, invertebrates, plants and lichens.

It is estimated that there are more than 60 million ash trees outside woodlands in the UK and that the majority will become affected with ash dieback in years to come. A proportion of these infected and weakened trees will pose safety risks, especially if they are next to a busy road, public pathway, school or community grounds. Anyone with an ash tree on

their land has a responsibility to ensure that risk posed by the tree is kept within appropriate limits.

### The future of ash trees

A small proportion of ash trees may have what's called 'genetic tolerance' to ash dieback, meaning they will survive and reproduce to create the next generation of trees. Therefore, tree owners have an important part to play in understanding the impacts of ash dieback on the environment and protecting tolerant and resistant trees and their associated wildlife wherever possible and safe to do so. ❌



A typical ash tree



## 1.

## What is ash dieback disease?

### How will ash trees be affected by ash dieback?

Ash dieback is caused by a fungus called *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (formerly known as *Chalara fraxinea*). It arrived in Europe from Asia during the 1990s and rapidly spread. Although the first official record in Britain was in 2012, later analysis shows that some UK trees were infected with the fungus as early as 2004.

The disease is a serious threat to the future of the common ash tree. Research from the UK and Europe has found that seven or eight out of every 10 ash trees may die (although there are some local variations), but some trees do show some levels of tolerance and may even recover over time.

Some research carried out in France and published in April 2020, suggests that isolated ash trees, such as those growing in hedges or other open areas, may be less affected by ash dieback than those in woodlands. Whether this will be the case in Britain, only time will tell.

The ash dieback fungus progressively damages the vascular tissues of the tree, causing

particular branches to die back by blocking their supply of water and nutrients, hence the name.

Ash dieback causes a range of symptoms including wilted and spotted leaves (see page 12 for more information and images). Most affected ash trees will lose some of the leaves at the top of the tree (which is called its crown). However, ash dieback can affect trees in different ways – for example, some may develop dark patches called ‘basal lesions’ at the base of their trunk, but have no sign of ash dieback in their leaves and branches. This is why it’s important to **consult a tree professional** if you are unsure. ▶



Image © Jon Stokes

**Ash trees in a woodland declining due to ash dieback**

Once the fungus infects a tree, the dead or dying branches can become brittle and fall. Over time, as the tree loses nutrition, water and the leaves which produce its food, the disease may eventually kill the tree. However, often other opportunistic disease-causing organisms (pathogens), such as honey fungus or shaggy bracket, may cause the eventual death of the tree by accelerating wood decay and tree failure rather than ash dieback itself.



Images © Jon Stokes

**Honey fungus****Shaggy bracket fungus**

## How important are ash trees in Britain and what are their benefits?

Ash trees are hugely valuable native trees and support almost 1,000 species including a huge variety of lichens, invertebrates and other wildlife. They are a valued part of our national treescape, especially in limestone areas such as the Cotswolds, where ash have been dominant and were historically managed as old pollards, particularly for wood fuel.

The annual estimated social and environmental value of ash trees growing outside woodlands is an estimated £230 million. Ash is a precious native species and no one tree can entirely replace it.

Ash dieback will have an impact on local ecosystems and the appearance of many



Image © Jon Stokes

**A hedgerow ash in the Cotswolds**

urban and rural green spaces we enjoy. However, if we work together across the country to tackle the issue, the disease presents an opportunity to develop UK 'treescapes' that are more resilient to pests, diseases and other threats. ❌

## 2.

## The science

### How is ash dieback spread?

Tiny fungal spores land on the leaves of an ash tree or at the base of the trunk. These wind-borne spores are produced from small white mushroom-like structures, **pictured right**, which grow on last year's fallen ash leaf stalks in the leaf litter.

While the fungus is naturally spread via airborne spores, it can also be spread by moving infected trees through trade, or moving fallen leaves.



Image © Jon Stokes

### Are any trees resistant to the disease? Is there a cure?

There is no known cure to this tree disease. However, there is long-term hope as several studies have reported that a low percentage of ash trees – between 1% and 5% of the population – may have a genetic tolerance to ash dieback, meaning they can survive and reproduce to eventually create the next generation of ash trees.

By retaining trees with no or limited signs of ash dieback, owners and tree managers might allow precious ash dieback-tolerant trees to live and reproduce.

In addition, dying and dead ash trees have huge ecological value, especially mature, veteran and ancient trees, so provided that they are managed following current guidance on **tree risk management**, it's important to keep them in the landscape.

Owners of ash trees in areas open to the public will have to balance conserving ash with managing ash trees which might pose a danger to the public. It is important all owners of ash trees understand their responsibilities (**see page 14**). ➔



## Does the fungus present a threat to humans or animals?

No, there is no evidence that the fungus can affect or infect humans or animals. The safety threat comes from dead or dying trees falling or dropping branches, causing injury or damage.

## How quickly will an infected tree die?

It is not possible to predict how long it will take for a specific tree to decline. The climate, site conditions and local tree cover appear to play a large role in the extent to which trees are affected by the disease. Isolated trees, trees growing in open areas or those in hedges appear to be far less affected than those in a forest environment.

The photographs in **Figure 1** show the change in one tree in Devon over one season (photographs taken on 6.7.2016) ▶

### Clearing fallen leaves from around infected trees

As the fungus grows in the leaves that fall on the ground in the autumn, clearing the leaf litter from around the bases of ash trees may reduce the levels of fungus spores present, which may increase the chances of the trees surviving for longer. This action should be considered especially for ancient, veteran or other trees of special importance. Always observe good biosecurity practices – more information can be found on the [government website](#).




Figure 1: Change in one tree over one season

Images from top to bottom: © Rob Wolton, Jon Stokes

and 7.7.2017). The pictures show a 10%-15% decline in the crown of a mature tree in a single season. However, reports show different rates of decline on a site-by-site basis.

Young ash, and those which have been coppiced (cut down to the base to encourage new growth) appear to generally decline from the disease quickly, while some ancient and mature trees, and ash trees outside woodlands, appear to be able to live for many years with the disease. However, mature ash trees with ash dieback can die more quickly if other pathogens, like honey fungus, take advantage of the already weakened tree. Trees have died from ash dieback in as little as two growing seasons.

Where the dark patches called 'basal lesions' are found on the trunks – usually in areas of dense ash populations and wet woodlands – these can make trees unstable and potentially dangerous more quickly. The rot found in these trees is usually associated with other secondary pathogens such as honey fungus and can occur without any obvious dieback symptoms in the crown. This makes identifying potentially 'dangerous' ash trees considerably harder. This is why it's important to learn to identify ash dieback, survey your trees and then get the advice of a qualified tree professional on what action you should take if you find any cause for concern (**See page 17**). 

## Stress in trees

The health of a tree can be heavily affected by its living conditions. Conditions that are not good for a tree's health are said to cause 'stress'. These might include: root damage from ploughing, root compaction caused by people walking over the land on top of a tree's roots, building development or utilities works, air pollution levels, or where a grown tree in an open area has been shaded by trees planted too close. Trees in urban settings may experience higher levels of stress, and this stress can make them more susceptible to the symptoms of ash dieback or other pests and diseases.

## 3.

## Spotting ash dieback in your trees

### Where do I start?

The general steps that you may need to take to manage your ash trees are:

- 1 Learn to identify ash trees
- 2 Learn to spot symptoms of ash dieback disease
- 3 Survey your ash trees on a regular basis (**see page 17**)
- 4 Consult a qualified, insured tree professional to get some specific advice on the health and risks associated with your ash trees
- 5 Make a decision on whether there are any trees which might require pruning or felling, based on the advice of a professional
- 6 Put a management plan in place and apply for a felling licence if necessary
- 7 Continue monitoring your ash trees
- 8 Replace ash trees that are lost with another species wherever possible (**see page 21**)

### How do I recognise an ash tree?

Ash is a very common tree, mostly found in woodland and hedgerows. In Britain, there are approximately 60 million ash trees growing outside woodlands, and an estimated two billion ash trees overall including all saplings and seedlings. ➔



## HOW TO SPOT AN ASH TREE



- **Leaves:** Ash leaves are 'compound leaves', comprising three to six pairs of 'leaflets', arranged in opposite pairs with one terminal leaflet at the end of the leaf



One ash leaf comprises many leaflets

- **Seeds:** Ash seeds (called 'keys') are flat single-winged seeds which hang in abundant bunches (sometimes confused with ash leaves wilted by dieback)



Ash seeds

Images © Jon Stokes

## Twigs with black leaf buds



- **Twigs and leaf buds:** Ash are easily identified in winter by their smooth twigs that have distinctive black, velvety buds arranged opposite each other.

## Grey/brown bark with lichen growing on it



- **Bark:** The bark is pale brown to grey, which fissures as the tree ages. Over 770 species of lichen can live on it.

## Height and form



- **Height and form:** When fully grown, ash trees can reach a height of 40 metres. ➔

Ash is most commonly confused with the rowan tree (which is sometimes also called the mountain ash). The main differences are:

- Mature rowan trees are much smaller than ash trees, growing to only 10 metres tall, compared to up to 40 metres in a mature ash tree
- Ash trees have shiny black buds in winter, where rowan trees have brown buds
- Ash flowers are small and black, while rowan flowers are white
- Ash produce seed in the form of winged 'keys', rowan produce berries
- Although both species have 'compound leaves' the whole leaf (all the leaflets) on rowan tree are in staggered pairs on the twig, while ash leaves grow opposite each other

Rowan trees cannot get ash dieback disease, although they can be affected by other diseases such as fireblight, which could lead to confusion. ➔



**A compound ash leaf**



**A compound rowan leaf**

Image © Jon Stokes



**Ash leaves are opposite each other**



**Rowan leaves are staggered on the branch**



Image © Creative Commons/E Dronkert



Image © Creative Commons/Siaron James

**Rowan tree (above), Rowan berries (right)**



## How can I identify ash dieback in my trees?

It is easiest to spot signs of ash dieback during the summer when trees should be in full leaf, **like the one below**. Ash comes into leaf at different times in the spring, sometimes as late as the end of May, but by mid-June all healthy ash should be in full leaf.

Some affected ash trees will fail to come into leaf at all, while others will 'flush' normally before showing signs of ill-health or dieback later. It's important to bear in mind that failure to flush or dieback in ash can have many causes, **so if an ash tree looks unhealthy, it does not automatically mean it is affected with ash dieback.** ➔



Image © Jon Stokes

A healthy ash tree



### SIGNS OF POSSIBLE ASH DIEBACK

- Spots on the leaves
- Wilted leaves
- Branches losing their leaves and 'dying back'
- Dark patches, called lesions, on the branches and/or trunk

The symptoms are easily visible in young trees, but they can be harder to recognise in more mature trees. Unfortunately, lesions can be caused by a number of factors including other fungi and bacteria and so dark patches alone do not necessarily mean the tree has ash dieback. For more detailed information on lookalike signs and symptoms of ash dieback, see the [Observatree guidance](#) here.

Anyone responsible for managing ash trees should learn to recognise the visual symptoms of ash dieback so they can assess the current health of their ash tree population and then consult, if appropriate, with a tree professional on what action they might take.

Once you know what you are looking for, you should survey your trees to assess their health. If you spot signs of ash dieback, you should survey them each year to track the progress of the disease.

### ASSESSING THE CROWN HEALTH OF YOUR ASH TREE

Suffolk County Council has developed a four-part system for assessing the health of an ash tree's crown. While other problems such as drought stress or root problems can cause crowns to look sparse and thin, crown health is a quick and useful gauge of the tree's overall health.

As crown health is not the only symptom of ash dieback, if you are unsure, consult with a qualified tree professional. ➔



Spots on the leaves



Wilted leaves



Branches losing their leaves



Dark patches on the trunks

All images © Jon Stokes

By looking at the crown of an ash tree, you should be able to place it in one of the following classes. Don't worry if you're not completely sure – just make your best guess:

**CLASS 1** 100%–76% of the crown remains

**CLASS 2** 75%–51% of the crown remains

**CLASS 3** 50%–26% of the crown remains

**CLASS 4** 25%–0% of the crown remains

This system does not allow you to make specific management judgements about the safety of any individual tree, but it helps to identify trees that may need attention.

If you are concerned about the extent of decline in your tree's canopy (especially if it starts to look like a class 3 or 4 tree), you need to decide how to manage your tree. It is usually best to consult a qualified tree professional who can survey your tree or trees, assessing their condition and the circumstances in which they are growing, to advise you on what action to take. If the tree is assessed as presenting an unacceptable risk to people or property, felling may be recommended. It is important to seek guidance quickly if you think your tree may be in a dangerous condition.

Otherwise, pruning work such as the removal of dead wood, a reduction of the crown, or the removal of a specific limb might manage the safety risk while allowing the tree to continue providing benefits to the landscape and to nature.

For your management options for an ash tree **see page 16**. **X**



Class 1



Class 2



Class 3



Class 4

All images © Gary Battell

## 4.

## Your responsibilities

**Managing the risk from trees is the responsibility of the owners and managers of the land on which they grow. If your ash tree or one of its branches falls on someone or someone else's property, you may be liable.**

### Understanding the law

Under both the civil law and criminal law, an owner of land on which a tree stands has responsibilities for the health and safety of those on or near the land and has potential liabilities arising from the falling of a tree or branch. The civil law gives rise to duties and potential liabilities to pay damages in the event of a breach of those duties. The criminal law gives rise to the risk of prosecution in the event of an infringement of the criminal law. Further details can be found in the National Tree Safety Group publication **'Common sense risk management of trees'**.

### Following official guidance

To help landowners understand the risk of harm posed by their trees and to manage such risk in a reasonable, balanced and proportionate way, national guidance has been produced by the National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) which should be followed by all tree owners.

NTSG's approach follows five key principles:

- Trees provide a wide variety of benefits to society
- Trees are living organisms that naturally lose branches or fall

- The overall risk to human safety is extremely low
- Tree owners have a legal duty of care
- Tree owners should take a balanced and proportionate approach to tree safety management

If you have any concerns about the health of your ash trees, you should consult a tree professional such as your Local Authority Tree Officer, or a qualified tree professional (see page 17).

### **Balancing safety with ecological benefits**

**Reasonable public safety must be the top priority when assessing what action to take on the trees you own. Levels of risk will range from low to high. Examples of locations where trees may present high levels of risks are: roads, car parks, railways, well-used public spaces, playgrounds, schoolgrounds and public right of ways.**

**Where ash trees pose a low safety risk, for example trees in hedges between two fields with no public access, they should be left to decline naturally so they can continue to contribute benefits to the environment (see page 17). ▶**



## 5.

## Options for managing affected ash trees

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### What are my options for managing my affected ash trees?

To decide which management option is most suitable for your ash trees, consider:

- Roughly what percentage of the crown has died?
- What risk does that tree pose to humans, animals or property?
- Can you mitigate the risk by means other than pruning or felling the tree (e.g. moving a pathway or a seat that is under the tree)?
- Is the tree old, or does it have a rich history worthy of preservation (ancient and veteran trees possess special cultural and ecological attributes)?
- Is the tree showing signs of tolerance to the disease?

**NOTE: THESE ARE SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS  
– THE LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY REMAINS WITH YOU AS THE TREE OWNER.  
WHEN IN DOUBT, CONSULT A QUALIFIED PROFESSIONAL FOR ADVICE.**

## MANAGEMENT POSSIBILITIES

There are a range of tree management options that can be considered for trees affected by ash dieback. These include:

- Retain the tree with no work – provided the risk level is acceptable
- Deadwood removal – prune dead wood and branches showing marked symptoms of dieback to reduce the risk from falling branches
- Pollarding/topping: if the tree is posing an unacceptable risk to people or property, reduce its height by removing all the upper branches and allowing it to regrow
- Coppicing – cut the tree to the base and allow it to regrow
- Felling – fell the tree and prevent regrowth. The larger the trees, the more likely the wood will be of habitat value. Where

possible, the felled wood should be left in situ in as large pieces as possible. See guidance from the [Ancient Tree Forum](#).

Each of these options carries different benefits and challenges. To decide which management option is most suitable, consider:


- which option manages the risks most effectively?
- what is your purpose in taking action? Do you want to retain trees where possible, or remove all risk?

The final decisions will need to be made by the landowner but professional advice from a competent tree professional will be invaluable. To find a local professional, consult your Local Authority Tree Officer, or see [the advice from the Arboricultural Association](#) or the [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#).

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## HOW DO I PUT AN ONGOING PLAN FOR TREE MANAGEMENT IN PLACE?

The National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) provides the following guidance for householders to ensure you are meeting your responsibilities:

- You don't need a written tree safety 'policy', but you should have a 'management plan' either written down or implicitly understood. This can be as simple as having a set of processes agreed between yourself and anyone else who manages trees on your land (a gardener, maintenance staff) for how you ensure your trees are safe to enjoy
- In order to inspect your trees, you should walk around your garden once a year in late summer/autumn. If your trees look sound and healthy with no obvious defects, that's all you need to do
- A tree or branch with no leaves on it in summer is probably dead. If it is a large tree, or a branch at height, it may be dangerous for you to remove it, so you will need to employ a competent, fully insured tree surgeon
- If your tree has what looks like a fungus on it, **look it up** to check what its presence means or get advice from a suitably knowledgeable and experienced person 

As ash dieback spreads, the number of ash trees with problems will rise. Tree managers should adapt their tree management plans to take this into account – this may include carrying out more frequent inspections of affected trees, especially if they are alongside a road or path or other high-risk sites.

When you've decided on a course of action, you should:

- Familiarise yourself with and observe all relevant tree and environmental legislation (**see page 20**)
- Ensure that trained, qualified and insured contractors carry out the work
- Wherever possible, re-plant trees with an appropriate species (**see this guidance from the Forestry Commission**)

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### WHERE CAN I GO FOR SPECIFIC ADVICE ON MY TREES?

The final decision on what action to take will need to be made by you, the tree owner, but you should seek professional advice from a fully insured tree management professional who holds the LANTRA Professional Tree Inspection Certificate.

To find a local professional, consult your Local Authority Tree Officer, or see **advice from the Arboricultural Association** or the **Institute of Chartered Foresters**.

It's important to note that only trained and

experienced tree surgeons or forestry workers should do work on ash trees affected by ash dieback. Be aware that rogue trader tree contractors operate in some areas. Seek advice from your Local Authority if you're unsure about a contractor.


### HOW DO I CONDUCT AN ASH SURVEY?

Local Authorities in **Norfolk** have produced guidance on conducting annual ash surveys to assess the risk posed by ash dieback symptoms, which they have kindly shared below:

- Inspect for ash dieback in the summer (mid-June to mid-September) when trees are in leaf and record the percentage of crown 'missing'
- Where possible, take photos so you can compare the changes in the trees between inspections
- If you have many trees, prioritise inspection of your trees by risk. For example, you might start with large trees beside roads or pathways, and inspect these trees most regularly
- Unless trees need urgent safety work, plan tree work outside of the bird nesting season (February – August)

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### WOULDN'T IT JUST BE EASIER TO FELL MY ASH TREES NOW?

Healthy looking ash trees should not be felled in anticipation of the disease, unless there are other overriding management requirements to do so. Ash dieback is having a serious impact 



on our treescape, and whatever we can do to retain trees in the landscape where safe to do so increases the chance that the next generation of ash trees will be able to grow and thrive.

Declining ash trees that may eventually die, can also continue to contribute ecological benefits if kept in the landscape for as long as possible. Therefore, where safe to do so, please consider keeping your ash trees in the landscape, and replace lost trees with other species.

### MY TREE(S) MAY POSE A RISK TO THE PUBLIC – WHAT DO I NEED TO CONSIDER?

If your tree(s) are seriously affected by ash dieback and are, for example, in an area of public access or next to a road or park, you may have to notify other organisations and/or take legislation into account. For example:

- Are there any constraints from the Local Planning Authority, e.g. does the tree have a Tree Preservation Order, or do you live in a Conservation Area? (**see page 19**)
- Do you need a felling licence? (**see page 19**)
- Is your tree along a roadside or railside? If so, you should contact the local Highway Authority (e.g. your County Council) or Network Rail before undertaking any tree work
- Is the tree host to any European Protected Species, e.g. bats? (**see page 20**)
- Is the land protected as a designated site such as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) or national nature reserve (NNR)? (**see page 21**)
- Might you be in breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WACA) 1981? (**see page 20**)

### Is there any money to help with the costs of managing my ash tree?

Currently there is no central or local government financial support for private individuals managing their trees with ash dieback in the non-woodland environment. It is the responsibility of the landowner to fund the management of the trees on their property, including the risks posed by ash dieback. Support for work in woodlands is available through Forestry Commission grants – see [here](#). ▶



Image © Jon Stokes

**Ancient ash trees, including living, dying or dead trees which have been managed down to the main stem, can have enormous ecological benefit**

## What do I do if my ash tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or grows in a conservation area?

If you have an ash tree which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), subject to certain exemptions, you must obtain formal permission from your Local Planning Authority, e.g. your District Council, to undertake work on this tree. That is, unless a felling licence would normally be required, in which case you should apply for the licence and declare the presence of the TPO on the application. If you live in a conservation area and want to undertake work on an ash tree which has ash dieback, you must notify your Local Planning Authority at least six weeks in advance. This gives the planning authority an opportunity to place a TPO on the tree if considered appropriate. There are some exceptions to these rules which differ in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, so consult your Local Planning Authority first.

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## Do I need a felling licence?

Tree felling is a legally controlled activity and you usually need permission to fell growing trees, including diseased ones. Licences are free and are issued by the Forestry Commission (in England) usually for a five-year period. Most felling licences will contain conditions that require felled trees or areas of woodland to be replaced by replanting or being allowed to regenerate. You generally don't require a felling licence to fell single trees that are standing in a garden although other permissions may be needed.

Some exemptions exist to the need for a felling licence, including:

- There is an immediate risk of serious harm and urgent work is needed on a tree to remove the risk
- Felling which yields less than 5m<sup>3</sup> of timber, to allow for very small-scale felling works. For example, a tree with a mid-trunk diameter of approx. 60cm and which stands 10-15m tall will generate c5m<sup>3</sup> of timber. You can find out more about [estimating timber volumes here](#)
- All trees that are standing in a garden. However, for larger estates or residences of unusual composition, land attached to a dwelling is not automatically considered to be a garden by the Forestry Commission.

There are no exemptions for diseased ash trees and the Forestry Commission therefore expects that most ash tree felling in response to ash dieback will be permitted through the use of an approved felling licence, unless the usual exemptions apply.

It's important to note that, in certain circumstances you may still need permissions from other organisations before you begin felling trees (see Tree Preservation Orders in Section 5 and Wildlife & Countryside Act and other environmental legislation in Section 6). Further information can be found in [Tree Felling, Getting Permission](#) and [Operations Note 46a](#), both by the Forestry Commission.

Guidance varies from country to country. You can find out more specific information on felling licences and exemptions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the links below.

- [England](#) | ● [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Scotland](#) | ● [Wales](#) 

## 6.

## Conservation and promoting a healthy treescape

### Keeping ash trees in the landscape for the future

The Tree Council, Defra and the Forestry Commission advocate that ash trees that do not pose a health and safety risk should be retained in the landscape wherever possible so they can continue to provide biodiversity benefits.

We strongly encourage all tree owners to replace ash trees lost by replanting other species. We hope that resistant ash trees will also regenerate naturally from seed.

### What do I need to know about the Wildlife and Countryside Act?

All birds, their nests and eggs, are protected by law and it is thus an offence, with certain exceptions, to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built

It is therefore necessary to ensure that any management work on an ash tree does not disturb nesting birds. If you think you have nesting birds using your ash tree consult a tree professional (**see page 17**).

### What do I need to do about European Protected Species (EPS)?

If there are rare, threatened or protected species in an ash tree (such as bats which may use holes in an old ash tree), specific advice is needed to protect them. It is illegal to:

- Capture, kill, disturb or injure them (on purpose or by not taking enough care)
- Damage or destroy their breeding or resting places (even accidentally)

To understand the law on protected species see the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk), which shows how to apply for a protected species licence. If you think you have bats or other protected species using your ash tree consult a tree professional (**see page 17**). ▶



A garden warbler in an ash tree

Image ©Commons / Allan Hopkins



### **What do I do about ash trees in parks, public open spaces and heritage sites?**

In public open spaces and public parks, the safety risks posed by ash dieback will be managed by the Local Authority or landowner, who will be responsible for managing their trees. If you see an ash tree that concerns you, contact the owners, describing the location and condition of the tree(s) in question.

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### **What do I do if my ash trees are in a designated site of special scientific interest (SSSI) or a national nature reserve (NNR) etc?**

Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced specific guidance on how to manage ash trees in protected sites. For details, see [here](#).

### **What species should I replace ash with?**

There is no one tree that can replace ash. However, **aspen, alder, field maple, sycamore, birch, rowan, oak and disease-resistant elm** are all good choices.

Your choice depends on why the replacement tree is being planted – is it for timber, wildlife or aesthetics? You might consider the following factors:

- Ash trees have a big beneficial impact on soil quality. **Alder** and **lime** leaves have similar qualities, as do to a smaller extent **sycamore, field maple** and **aspen**
- Many of the generalist birds and mammals that feed on ash can also be found on **oak** and **beech, sycamore, birch** and **hazel** ▶



**A mature oak (left), and a mature sycamore (right)**

Images © Jon Stokes


- For the specialist ash related insects, mosses and lichens, disease-resistant **elm** is the best substitute, followed by **sycamore, aspen, oak** and **hazel**

Alternative tree selection also varies depending on the conditions of the site where the tree will grow and the type of location, such as a hedgerow, garden or park.

New ash trees can be allowed to grow from seed (natural regeneration), but it is likely that most of these young trees may die from ash dieback themselves. Of course, any that survive may be the future of our ash population and should be nurtured carefully.

It is now theoretically possible to buy ash trees from nurseries within Britain and Europe. However, The Tree Council cannot recommend the purchase or planting of any ash trees at this stage, as there are currently no guaranteed disease-resistant strains available on the market.

An Ash Dieback Resilience Group has been set up in Devon and **suggests the following:**

- 1 Act now to minimise the landscape impact of ash tree loss – start promoting new trees and taking better care of existing trees
- 2 Use the Devon 3/2/1 formula: plant at least 3 new trees for loss of a large tree, 2 for a medium tree and 1 tree for a small tree
- 3 Promote natural regeneration (letting new trees grow from the natural seeds) wherever possible, particularly in woodlands
- 4 Grow the right trees in the right places in the right ways and give them the right aftercare
- 5 Encourage a diverse range of trees to develop a resilient landscape
- 6 When choosing species, consider local factors such as what trees are characteristic of the area, soil type, management requirements, local stresses
- 7 For wildlife, landscape and woodfuel, choose native species, or those well established in the British Isles, such as sycamore, wild pear, crab apple or white willow. In urban areas it is more acceptable to use species from other parts of the world
- 8 Reduce the risks of introducing new diseases by only planting trees grown in Britain, by reputable nurseries 

## Ancient, veteran and heritage trees

Ancient, veteran and heritage trees are irreplaceable. They have great ecological, cultural and amenity value.

Much of the value of these trees can be retained for a long time, even after they have died. There is also some evidence that ancient and veteran trees may be more tolerant to ash dieback than other ash trees.

Therefore, when considering what action to take on such a tree, the advice of an experienced tree consultant who is knowledgeable in the care of ancient trees and their management for reasonable public safety should be sought. They will be able to advise on the level of risk posed and help you understand your options. For example, in some circumstances moving the 'target' (i.e who or what might be harmed) by fencing off an informal footpath

### Terminology:

**Ancient trees** are those which have reached a great age in comparison with others of the same species.

**Veteran trees** can be any age, but will have ancient characteristics such as heartrot or hollowing of the trunk or major limbs.

**Heritage trees** are trees that are part of our history and culture, and can be connected with specific historic events or people.

Source: Ancient Tree Forum

may be a simpler and less costly option than removal or carrying out drastic tree surgery.

If there are no health and safety reasons that demand work to ancient, veteran, heritage or any other isolated ash trees, where possible the trees should be left to decline naturally. If leaf litter gathers around the base of these trees, it should be removed and destroyed (such as by composting), to reduce the levels of the fungus present. ▶

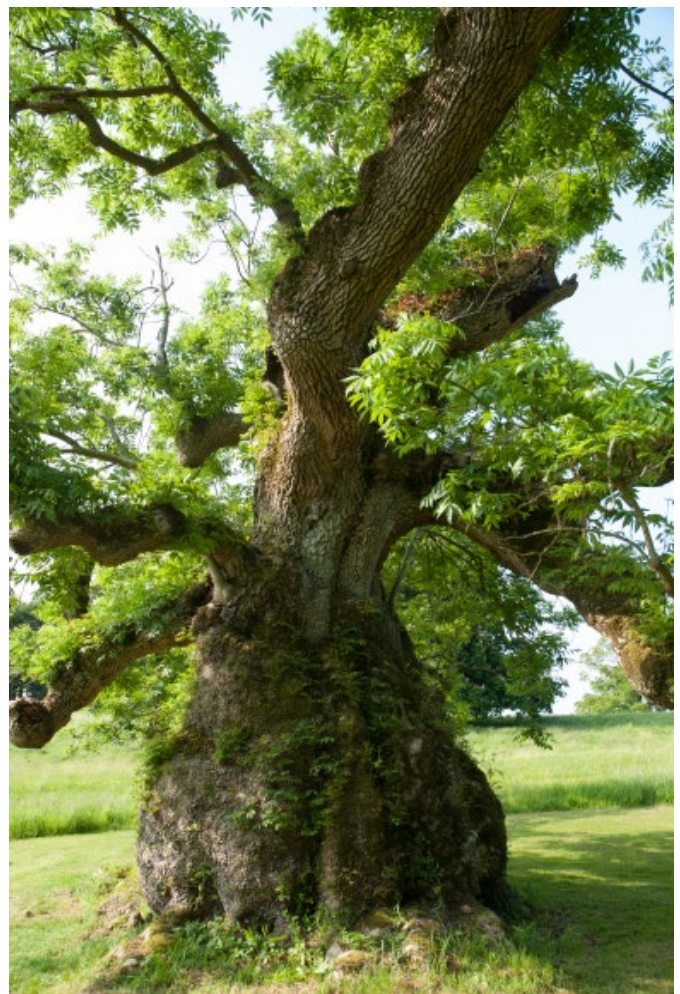


Image © Jon Stokes

An ancient ash




## About this guidance:

- This guide was produced by The Tree Council with expert input from the following organisations:

- Defra
- Forestry Commission
- Forest Research
- Natural England
- Arboricultural Association
- Ancient Tree Forum
- London Tree Officers Association
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- National Tree Safety Group
- Suffolk County Council
- Norfolk County Council

With thanks to all who have helped develop and review this guidance.

- The data in this document are solely the view of The Tree Council and contributors. The authors do not accept any liability for any loss incurred as a result of relying on its contents
- To find a qualified tree consultant, visit the [Arboricultural Association](#) or the [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#)

- There are a variety of online resources available to help with identifying ash dieback, including:
  - [The Forestry Commission dieback identification advice](#)
  - [The Observatree ash dieback identification guide](#)
  - [The Tree Council guide to symptoms in large trees](#)
  - [Arboricultural Association Ash Dieback Guidance for Tree Owners, Managers, Contractors and Consultants](#)
- [The National Tree Safety Group](#) (NTSG) provides detailed guidance on dealing with ash dieback, which should be followed by all owners of trees
- This guidance is in line with the government recommendations in the [Tree Health Resilience Strategy](#), published in May 2018
- For more information on managing individual ash trees affected by ash dieback, see the [Forestry Commission Operations Note 46a](#) 

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## ASH DIEBACK DISEASE

# A GUIDE FOR TREE OWNERS

[www.treecouncil.org.uk](http://www.treecouncil.org.uk) | [info@treecouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@treecouncil.org.uk)

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Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

