



ASH DIEBACK

Farmer Information Sheet

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.



Crown of affected ash dieback tree

Why is it a concern?

Ash is the second most common tree in the UK and occurs naturally in woodlands and hedgerows across Devon. Sadly around 90% 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 Devon 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. Ninety-nine percent of the ash trees within falling distance of highways are the responsibility of FARMERS AND OTHER LANDOWNERS. The Highways Authority is responsible for only a small number of trees.

Farmers and landowners have a key role to play in restoring landscapes when ash trees start to disappear, by replacing ash with other suitable species.

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.

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.



Lesion on young tree affected by ash dieback

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.
-  New cases of the disease 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). 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.
-  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. Any felling near a highway will require liaison with Devon County Council. Also be aware of the requirements of protected species and their habitats e.g. active bird nests or bat roosts.
-  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 3-2-1 formula: plant 3 saplings for the loss of a large tree, 2 for a medium tree and 1 for a small tree.
-  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.

Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum www.devonashdieback.org.uk

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

Forestry Commission www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-felling-overview

 0300 067 4960 (local)  southwest.fce@forestrycommission.gov.uk

FWAG SouthWest www.fwagsw.org.uk

 01823 660684 (local)  info@fwagsw.org.uk