

Changes to UK national measures against ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)

The UK introduced national measures against ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) in 2012 – these required all imports of ash trees (*Fraxinus* species) to originate from pest-free areas for ash dieback, therefore import and movement of ash was essentially prohibited.

The UK meets World Trade Organization obligations and operates the EU Plant Health Regulation and will continue to do so until the end of the Transition Period. Under certain circumstances, the UK also uses national measures to enhance or supplement the main biosecurity provisions in the EU Regulation. These national measures are only used to protect against pests or diseases that are not already established in the UK. Ash dieback no longer meets these criteria – it is well established and widely distributed, being present in every county. As such, there is no technical case and no purpose to retaining national measures against ash dieback. There is much more benefit to be gained from lifting the restrictions, so that tolerant ash trees can be bred, moved and planted. The main risk to ash now is from entry of new strains of ash dieback present in Asian countries but not Europe, as well as pests such as the emerald ash borer.

Imports of ash trees from third countries will continue to be prohibited by the plant health regulation, under a provision which prohibits the import of certain ‘high-risk’ species, pending an EU-wide approved risk assessment demonstrating that such imports can take place safely. This mitigates the main risk of introducing new strains.

Key facts

- Imports of ash trees from third countries continue to be prohibited
- Since 13th January 2020 national measures against the import of ash from the EU no longer apply, and trade in ash trees from the EU could resume, as well as domestic movements.
- Given the current situation with ash dieback in the UK, importing ash is not a sustainable planting choice, and the trade is asked to ensure strong biosecurity practices are followed in their planting choices.
- Lifting of the internal movement restrictions for ash will allow both scientists and landowners to move potential tolerant species and strains of ash trees within the UK to help support the recovery and repopulation of our treescape.

Buying ash from Europe

In most cases ash will not be a sustainable planting choice and there is no disease-tolerant ash on the market. Biosecurity should remain at the heart of buying practices. The import of ash from third countries continues to be prohibited. This will reduce the main risk of entry of both new strains of ash dieback present in Asian countries, as well as dangerous novel pests such as the emerald ash borer.

Moving ash trees

The lifting of movement restrictions within the UK will be beneficial for research purposes and will help support work to repopulate the landscape with tolerant trees in the future. Considerable progress has already been made to identify tolerant trees. We are conducting the world’s largest screening trials for tolerant ash trees and have planted the UK’s first archive of tolerant trees (3000 trees) in 2020. Tolerance is heritable which offers hope for a future breeding programme. It remains important to ensure biosecurity is at the heart of buying practices.