Quick guide 01 / Tree safety

Know your trees.

A simple guide to tree safety

Most trees are safe, and serious accidents involving trees are very rare. This guide explains your responsibilities, the warning signs to look out for, and what to do if you spot one.

1 Your duty of care

If you own or manage land with trees, you have a duty to take reasonable care that they do not harm people or property. The law does not expect every tree to be free of risk. It expects a sensible, proportionate approach: know what trees you have, check them, and act on anything that looks wrong.

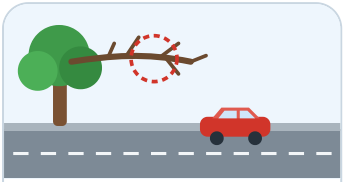
2 Think about who is nearby

The same defect matters far more over a busy road than in a quiet corner. Give the closest attention to trees where people and property are most often within reach.

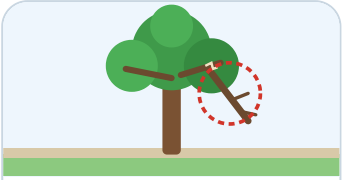
Check more often
Roads, footpaths, play areas, car parks, entrances and buildings

Check less often
Quiet field edges, fenced woodland and areas few people use

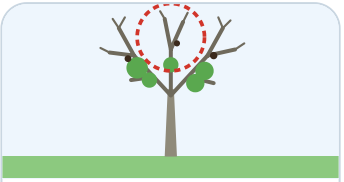
3 Warning signs to look out for



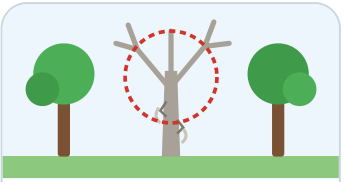
Dead branches
Branches with no leaves when the rest of the tree is in leaf, or brittle, snapped wood.



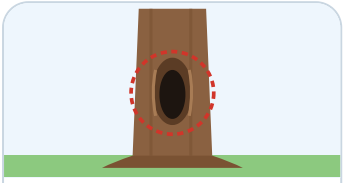
Hanging branches
Broken branches caught in the crown can fall without warning, especially after windy periods.



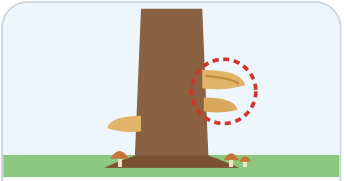
Ash dieback
Ash trees with thinning crowns, dead twigs at the top and blackened leaves.



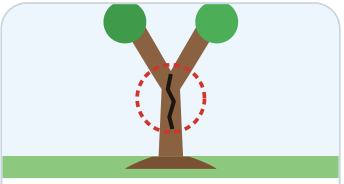
Dead or dying trees
A tree with no leaves, or bare and peeling bark, when trees around it are green.



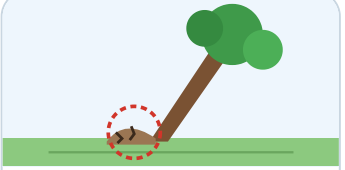
Hollows and decay
Holes, cavities or soft, crumbling wood can weaken a tree. Many hollow trees are stable, so get it checked.



Fungi
Brackets on the trunk or mushrooms around the base can be a sign of decay inside.



Cracks and splits
Cracks in the trunk, or splits where stems fork.



Leaning trees
A tree that has started to lean, or soil cracking and heaving around its base.

4 What to do

Look regularly
Walk round your trees in summer and in winter, and always after strong winds. Dead branches show up best in leaf, and cracks and hollows once the leaves have fallen.

Keep people safe
If you spot a warning sign near a road, path or building, keep people away from beneath the tree until it has been checked.

Get expert advice
Ask a qualified arboriculturist to inspect the tree. Do not climb trees or cut large branches yourself.

Keep your paperwork
Keep tree survey reports and details of any work carried out. They show you have looked after your trees. Check whether trees are protected before any work.

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Independent tree management consultants

This guide is general information only. It is not a substitute for a professional tree inspection.

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