Know your ash trees.

A simple guide to ash dieback

Ash dieback is affecting ash trees across Scotland. This guide explains how to recognise ash and the signs of the disease, and what to do about it.

1 What is ash dieback?

Ash dieback is a disease caused by a fungus, first found in Britain in 2012. It spreads by spores, released from tiny fungi on fallen infected leaves and carried on the wind, sometimes many miles. Most infected trees decline and many will die, though a few seem able to tolerate it. Dying ash becomes brittle, and damage at the base can bring down whole trees.

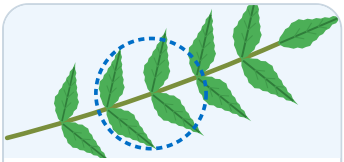
2 Think about who is nearby

Your duty of care still applies. An infected ash over a busy road needs far more attention than one in a quiet wood.

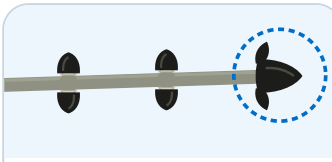
Act first
Roads, footpaths, play areas, car parks, railways and buildings

Can often wait
Quiet woods and field edges, where dying ash also helps wildlife

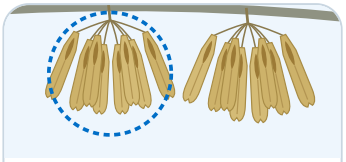
3 Is it an ash tree?



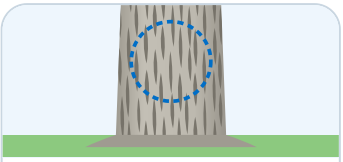
Leaves
Leaves made of 7 to 13 leaflets in opposite pairs, with one leaflet at the tip.



Buds
Black, velvety buds in opposite pairs. They make ash easy to spot in winter.



Keys
Seeds with a single wing, called keys, hang in bunches and often stay on into winter.



Bark
Pale grey bark, smooth on young trees, with a criss-cross of ridges on older ones.

4 Signs of ash dieback

Blackened leaves
Leaves wilt and turn black in summer, often with dark patches on the leaf stalks.

Thinning crown
Sparse leaves and bare, dead twig tips in the crown.

Crown dieback
The top dies back, often with bushy shoots lower down and dark patches on the bark.

Dead trees
No leaves in midsummer, when trees around it are in full leaf.

5 What to do

Look in summer
Signs show best from about July to early September, while ash is in leaf. A thinning crown is often the easiest clue to spot.

Start near people
Ask a qualified arboriculturist to inspect ash near roads, paths and buildings, and advise on work and its priority.

Do not fell too soon
Do not remove healthy-looking ash just in case, as some tolerate the disease. Replant with a mix of other species.

Check before work
Dead ash is dangerous to climb, so use a qualified contractor. Check for protection, felling permission, nesting birds and bats.

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

0141 345 2849
info@treeplanner.co.uk
www.treeplanner.co.uk