



MANAGING CHALARA FRAXINEA (ASH DIEBACK)

GUIDANCE FOR WOODLAND OWNERS AND MANAGERS

1. Introduction

Chalara fraxinea (Ash dieback) is well established in the wider environment in the east of England, especially east Kent, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk and in pockets in many other areas of England and Wales. Based on evidence from elsewhere in Europe it can be expected to spread to other areas of the country in the coming years. Chalara cannot be eradicated, there is no known cure, but landowners and managers can take steps to slow the rate of spread, protect timber values, minimise the impact on biodiversity and increase the longer term resilience of trees and woods.



The advice given here is consistent with advice published by the Forestry Commission (FC) (www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara) and does not intend to replace it. FC advice is updated as new information comes to light. Woodland owners are encouraged to seek additional advice from a professional forestry consultant.

For further information on identifying symptoms and reporting suspected cases of Chalara see: www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara#spread

Map showing distribution of Chalara May 2014 (source Forestry Commission)

2. Principles

The RFS endorses the principles underlying FC guidance on the management of Chalara which are consistent with good woodland management practice:

- maintaining the values and benefits associated with ash woodlands and iconic trees;
- securing an economic return where timber production is an important objective;
- reducing the presence and rate of spread of Chalara dieback;
- maintaining as much genetic diversity in ash trees as possible with the aim of ensuring the presence of ash in the long term; and
- minimising impacts on associated species and wider biodiversity

3. Management options

Before taking any action, woodland owners and managers need to consider their woodland management objectives and local circumstances.



a. Uninfected stands

- Carry on with planned work and thin to promote fast, healthy growth in selected trees.
- Adhere to guidance on biosecurity, ensuring tools are disinfected, boots and clothes cleaned and ash leaves are not moved from the wood
- Regularly monitor trees for signs of Chalara and if found, report it to the FC.



Photo: Recently thinned ash stand

b. Infected stands

i. Young stands (<25 years)

- Where **disease levels are low**, thin woodland as usual. Select diseased trees for thinning which show symptoms of Chalara, preferably when in full leaf to ensure the right tree is felled, and where possible burn the brush. Remove recently planted trees and natural regeneration if small numbers are infected and burn or bury them on site. Do not bring forward coppicing of ash as this will make stools and new growth more vulnerable to Chalara.
- Where **disease levels are high** (>50% of the stand infected) do not rush to fell ash, remove recently planted trees or kill ash coppice. These actions will prevent identification of resistant trees. Where timber value is important, consider felling ash to realise the value before the timber condition deteriorates or thin to favour alternative species. Consider leaving some trees that are close to dying for deadwood and biodiversity and restock with alternative species which are suitable to the local site conditions. Consider Natural England guidance on alternative species which most closely replicate the ecological value of ash (see link at the bottom of this note). Validate the provenance of any new stock with your nursery prior to purchase.
- Where **timber production is not a consideration**, aim to retain ash in the wood for as long as possible to provide habitat for species dependent on ash and to allow time to identify trees that may be resistant. Continuing to manage the wood will ensure less spore production and more light on the woodland floor to encourage regeneration and structural diversity.

ii. Older stands

- Take an **individual-tree approach**. There should be a presumption against the felling of ancient, veteran or mature ash trees, whether or not they are infected with Chalara. However where more than 50% of the crown is infected consider felling. If less than 50% is infected the tree

should be regularly monitored and symptoms of Armillaria (honey fungus) checked as this is often the secondary infection that kills the tree.

iii. Coppice

- Where there are low numbers of infected coppice stools in the wood consider killing them. Attempting to regenerate a wood from coppice stools is not recommended as coppice regrowth is likely to be infected.
- Avoid carrying out traditional coppice operations where ash forms >30% of the canopy.

iv. Urban/parkland/hedgerow trees

- There is evidence that removal of leaf litter combined with the lower humidity in urban and parkland environments can significantly reduce and slow the impact of Chalara.
- There should not be a presumption to fell infected trees in these environments as these trees can continue to provide benefits even when dead. Carry out a full risk assessment before taking action. Public safety is of paramount importance in this assessment.

More information:

Kent Downs AONB guidance on management of Chalara: www.kentdowns.org.uk

Ash Tag www.ashtag.org/ provides information on identification and monitoring of Chalara.

Natural England: Assessing and addressing the impacts of ash dieback on UK woodlands and trees of conservation importance: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5273931279761408>

Defra Chalara Management Plan: www.gov.uk/government/publications/chalara-management-plan