

Consultation to protect plants from harmful pests and diseases

Keen gardeners, nursery owners, farmers, landowners and environmental groups are all being encouraged to help shape the country's future plant biosecurity strategy, as a 10-week consultation is launched today (Tuesday 21 September) to protect the country from the threat of plant pests and diseases.

Healthy plants are essential for both the environment and the economy. In the UK, 80% of the food we eat comes from plants, they produce 98% of the oxygen we breathe and the value that our plants and trees provide to society each year is estimated at £10.5 billion.

Great Britain already has some of the most robust biosecurity measures in the world but our approach is kept under constant review to ensure these standards are maintained and plants are protected as we face emerging challenges.

Rising temperatures increase the risk that non-native pests and diseases, which were previously unable to survive in the UK, will spread across parts of the country. Disease outbreaks can be hugely costly to businesses, government and the wider economy.

Plant diseases like Xylella – a disease that affects over 560 different plant species and devastated olive trees in Europe – have the potential to cost the UK taxpayer millions of pounds a year if they arrived on our shores.

The joint Defra, Scottish and Welsh Government consultation sets out a new vision for plant health and potential measures to strengthen the existing biosecurity regime. Specifically, views are sought on:

- the effectiveness of our current plant and tree health regulations;
- ways industry and the Government can work together to support a biosecure plant supply chain and ensures the safe sourcing of planting stock;
- how we enhance the nation's technical capability, using innovative science and technology to keep pace with emerging threats and ensure preparedness for the future; and
- tougher action to protect against biosecurity risks associated with trees susceptible to high-risk pests and diseases.

Launching the consultation from RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Minister for Biosecurity Lord Benyon said:

The threat from plant pests and diseases is significant and growing due to globalisation and climate change. The risks to food production and our precious landscapes, trees, parks and gardens are all too real.

We already have some of the highest biosecurity standards in Europe but as we look to build back greener from the pandemic, we want to consider any further safeguards needed to protect our natural world. That's why we're asking for views from all sectors, including horticulture, forestry and farming, to help us shape our future biosecurity strategy and ensure our trees and plants are protected for future generations.

UK Chief Plant Health Officer Nicola Spence said:

We take the nation's biosecurity very seriously and currently have some of the strongest measures in Europe. This consultation provides an opportunity for us to build on our current regulations and ensure our high plant health and biosecurity standards are maintained.

I urge everyone working in the sector and the public to respond to this consultation so we can uphold our biosecurity standards for future generations.

Wales' Minister for Climate Change, Julie James said:

The consultation reflects our shared ambitions for a strengthened biosecurity regime, and is clear on the need to work in partnership to achieve our aims.

Plant Biosecurity is hugely important to address threats from pests and diseases and this consultation is an opportunity for all to inform our future approach to plant health.

Scotland's Minister for Environment and Land Reform Màiri McAllan said:

Plants underpin our environment, rural industries, wellbeing and biodiversity. With an ever increasing number of plant health threats, we need to work collaboratively to effectively shape our policies and safeguard against biosecurity risks in the years ahead. I would therefore encourage all stakeholders to contribute to that process by responding to this consultation.

Today's announcement coincides with the Chelsea Flower Show. This year's RHS Show shines a spotlight on the importance of protecting biodiversity and our planet with the COP26 garden, ahead of the UK's Presidency at the climate change summit this November.

This consultation supports Defra's campaign – [Plant for Our Planet](#) – which aims to inspire the nation to get planting, helping us to build back greener and step up our efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. Our

plants have a crucial role to play in fighting climate change, providing a home for nature, and bring numerous environmental, economic, social and wellbeing benefits.

The new strategy will align with forthcoming GB Invasive Non-Native Species Strategy, ensuring a joined-up approach to the restoration and improvement of the environment as set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan where we have committed to improving biosecurity.

The consultation closes on 30 November 2021 and can be found [here](#).