

Oak Processionary Moth

We've been asked by the Tree Council and Defra for your help with an urgent tree health matter concerning recent outbreaks of Oak Processionary Moth.



If you know anyone who has recently planted larger oaks (as defined in the press notice below) imported from the continent, Defra is requesting that they check these trees for OPM, and report any findings to [Tree Alert](#). At this time of year, you are most likely to notice the hairy-looking caterpillar or web-like nests - please do not touch either as they could potentially be harmful to your health. Please find further guidance from Defra below, and for more information on the moth and its identification, visit [Observatree](#) or [Forest Research](#).



Horticulture industry urged to check for Oak Processionary Moth



Landscapers, nurseries, landowners and woodland managers are being urged to take action after the Plant Health Service intercepted a number of cases of [Oak Processionary Moth caterpillars](#) (OPM) on trees imported from the

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Netherlands.

Anyone who has planted larger oaks (defined below) imported from the continent should urgently check their trees for OPM and report any findings to [TreeAlert](#). It is vital that these trees are checked now to minimise the spread of this damaging tree pest and protect the health of our oak trees.

OPM is an established pest in parts of London and surrounding areas, but the rest of the country is designated as a Protected Zone. Swift action is being taken by the Plant Health Service to eradicate recent findings of OPM in Hampshire, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, including surveillance, tracing work and destruction of both the caterpillars and infested trees. The Plant Health Service have also announced an urgent review of import controls on oaks.

OPM caterpillars feed on oak leaves and can increase trees' vulnerability to attack by other pests and diseases, making them less able to withstand weather conditions such as drought and floods. The cases highlight the need for continued vigilance from industry and government to protect the UK's trees.

Dr Anna Brown, Head of Tree Health & Contingency Planning, Forestry Commission, said: "Those of us involved in importing or trading plants must maintain our vigilance against exotic pests and diseases such as OPM. There is a lot we can do such as buying British, only buying stock from reputable, responsible suppliers and inspecting imported plants.

"Inspect, inspect and inspect again – we can't check imported plants too often for signs of trouble. Don't presume that because your supplier found no evidence of a pest or disease that you won't either. You might spot something that they have missed."

The [Forestry Commission](#), councils and land managers tackle the pest with an annual control programme of tree treatment. Increased measures to protect the country from the spread of OPM were introduced in 2018. Restrictions on the import of most species of oak into England have also been introduced as part of these regulations to protect native trees.

Professor Nicola Spence, Defra Chief Plant Health Officer, said: "Since 2012 we have invested more than £37 million in tree health research, including a dedicated programme of research and development on oak.

"We will continue to work with local authorities and land managers to tackle OPM with a control programme of treatment and surveillance. In 2018, we introduced tighter restrictions on the importation of oak trees to England but are now looking at options to strengthen these even further.

"The Plant Health Service has received reports of an exceptional expansion of the OPM population in parts of Europe, due the hot weather experienced last year."

If you suspect OPM, you should not attempt to destroy or move infected material yourself as the nests and caterpillars can pose some risks to human health. For

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more on how to identify OPM, visit <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/opm>.

Further information:

- Larger oaks are defined here as those with a girth >8cm at 1.2m above the root collar.
- To report sightings of pests and diseases, use the TreeAlert online portal: <https://treealert.forestresearch.gov.uk/>
- The Plant Health Service is made up of Defra, Animal and Plant Health Agency and the Forestry Commission.
- For more on OPM, visit: <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/pest-and-disease-resources/oak-processionary-moth-thaumetopoea-proceSSIONEA/>
- For guidance on importing trees and plants to England and Wales from the EU visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/importing-trees-and-plants-to-england-and-wales-from-the-eu>
- To find out more about plant health Protected Zones visit: <https://planthealthportal.defra.gov.uk/resources/plant-health-protected-zones/>
- To find out how the government will work with others to protect England's tree population from pest and disease threats, see the Tree Health Resilience Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tree-health-resilience-strategy-2018>.
- The Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) is part of the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and implements and enforces plant health policy in England, and in Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government. For more information on plant health controls, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plant-health-controls>