



Tree Damage Alert No 117

AAIS • Alice Holt Lodge • Wrecclesham • Farnham • Surrey • GU10 4LH

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Call the Tree Helpline on: 09065 161147

Calls cost £1.50 per minute

A Flush of Growth.

*“Oak before the ash
There’s going to be a splash
Ash before the oak
There’s going to be a soak”*

The British are renown for their obsession with the weather. Recent weather patterns have fuelled the popular picture of unpredictability. In 2006 ‘April showers’ seemed to have advanced to become ‘March showers’, but in 2007 the same weather had slipped to be ‘May showers’. So does the weather lore need rewriting?

This spring there have been very notable differences between the flushing time of the Oaks and Ash. Comments suggest that Oaks may have been as much as two weeks early in flushing while the Ash have been notably late flushing. The delay in the bud burst of Ash has been so marked that owners have become concerned about the health and condition of their trees. Tree Officers and consultants alike have been answering questions about tree health and resisting applications for permission and notifications of intended felling of tree subject of Tree Preservation Orders or in Conservation Areas. So what has happened to the Ash trees through most of southern England?

Examination of affected trees has failed to reveal the presence of either pests or diseases and the symptoms are not those of Ash decline reported by Hull and Gibbs (1991).

Nurserymen are familiar with Ash trees failing to flush in the spring following planting, particularly when the trees have been in cold storage where temperatures are generally held

at +2°C, during the winter. The trees can then remain apparently ‘dead’ throughout the summer. The following spring these trees will flush normally. The phenomenon is attributed to the trees not having experienced a sufficiently cold period to break their dormancy. Certainly the thumb nail test will show that such ‘dormant’ trees are alive from bud through to the roots. Also Ash is known to be affected during the growing season by drought conditions which can cause early dormancy! A very mild winter followed by a dry spring?

Noticing the late flushing of the Ash trees has prompted consideration of other species of trees. Some trees have produced very small leaves as a first flush. Subsequent, ‘lammas’ growth has been more normal with considerable shoot extension. This may reflect a period of very dry soil just at the critical time that water is needed to expand the leaves and shoots laid down in the buds formed the previous year.

Will the Ash trees that have at last come into leaf produce another flush of lammas growth in mid summer as usual? Time will tell! As for folk lore:

*“Oak before the ash
There’s going to be a soak
Ash before the oak
There’s going to be a splash”*

just does not have the same ring!

Derek Patch, AAIS, Farnham

Reference:

Hull, S. K., and Gibbs, J.N. (1991) Ash dieback. A survey of non-woodland trees. *Forestry Commission Bulletin 93*. HMSO, London.

This is one in an occasional series of Tree Damage Alerts produced for the benefit of the arboricultural profession and issued by the Arboricultural Advisory and Information Service.

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