



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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uk  
[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

**Date:** 8 September 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Act now to keep the UK *Xylella* free**

*Xylella fastidiosa* presents a serious threat to plants in the UK. The best defence against the disease is to prevent its arrival, which is why it is essential Government and industry work together to keep it out of the country.

*Xylella* is a very infectious bacterial disease that is already devastating olive trees in southern Italy and affecting a range of trees and plants in Spain and France. The impact on the sector were *Xylella* to arrive in the UK would be significant - commercially and environmentally important trees and plants would be at risk, while restrictions would include a ban on movement of host plants from premises within 10km of an outbreak for at least five years. In countries with significant outbreaks the disease has already proved impossible to eradicate, with major restrictions imposed on businesses in outbreak areas.

Government is taking strong action to prevent the arrival of the disease. In Europe we are pushing for greater protections and have asked the European Commission to strengthen requirements for high risk hosts to provide additional assurance that they are free of the disease when moved. In the UK, we are carrying out inspections of all consignments of host plants of *Xylella* imported from outside the EU and have an inland surveillance programme, targeted at host plants being grown and traded. We are also disseminating publicity material, including information on the high risk plants and guidance on sourcing plants.

Many plant traders are already on the front foot against *Xylella*. Nurseries and garden centres have already committed not to bring *Xylella* host plants into the UK from countries or regions of the EU where the disease is present and management practices are being employed around careful sourcing, traceability and good hygiene measures, to reduce the risk of introducing the disease.

To keep our country protected against *Xylella* it is vital that all plant importers and traders follow this lead. I urge you to make careful decisions on sourcing plants, particularly those from countries where *Xylella* is present, and review on-site measures to reduce the risk of

disease introduction and spread. Guidance is available [on the plant health portal](#)<sup>1</sup> and [on GOV.UK](#)<sup>2</sup> while the HTA have also published a '[5 point plan](#)'<sup>3</sup> against *Xylella* for those involved in the commercial supply and receipt of plants.

*Xylella* is not currently in the UK and it is essential that all of us with an interest in a healthy, thriving plant and horticulture industry do all we can to keep it that way and protect our environment and businesses.

Let's work together to keep *Xylella* out.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Spence', written in a cursive style.

Professor Nicola Spence  
Chief Plant Health Officer for the UK

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<sup>1</sup> <https://planthealthportal.defra.gov.uk/pests-and-diseases/high-profile-pests-and-diseases/xylella/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protecting-plant-health-topical-issues>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hta.org.uk/news/retailers-xylella-statement.html>