

A NATIONAL CONVERSATION



about plant health

Baselining public awareness, attitudes and motivations



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency



Forest Research

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A National Conversation about Plant Health

'A society that values healthy plants' is one of the four key outcomes laid out in the [2023 Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain](#). This means raising awareness of plant health issues and encouraging people to change their behaviour.

Part of this journey is to understand current public attitudes to plant health. From there we can develop ways to promote plant healthy behaviours for key target audiences. This work is being done by [A National Conversation](#) - a DEFRA-funded research programme delivered by Forest Research.

This report summarises the results of a national baseline survey.

Big Questions for A National Conversation

- *Who should we be talking to?* Who is most open to change? Whose actions present the greatest risk?
- *What should we talk about and when?* Based on people's knowledge, interests and motivations, what messages might be most effective?
- *What are the barriers to change and how can we overcome them?* Taking account of factors like ability to act, existing beliefs and economic realities.

About the National Baseline Survey

7000
participants
in England

22 online
questions



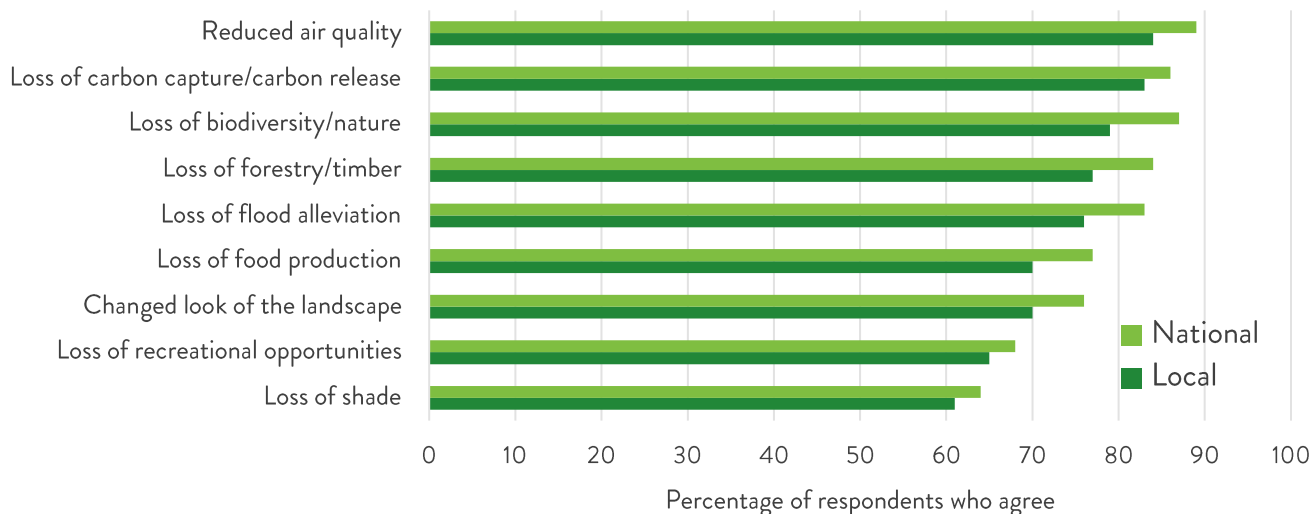
Conducted
Nov/Dec 2021



Demographic split
representative of
English population

Do people recognise the value of healthy plants?

What do you think would be the impact of many plants/trees being removed or killed by pests/diseases in your local area or nationally?



Key Points

- Most people recognise that plants have environmental, aesthetic, economic and recreational value.
- National impacts matter more than local impacts.
- Air quality, carbon capture and biodiversity are the top issues both locally and nationally.
- [Outdoor Leisure participants](#) are significantly more concerned about all impacts.
- [Members](#) care significantly more about the look of the landscape, recreational loss and shade loss.
- Concern about all impacts increases as people get older.

How the survey data was analysed

For most questions respondents were asked to respond using a 7-point scale from strongly disagree (1-3) to neutral (4) to strongly agree (5-7). Unless otherwise specified the data shown in this report is the percent who agreed (selected 5, 6 or 7 on the scale) with the statement.

These results were then analysed considering various demographic factors like age, gender, education level, income and ethnicity as well as their behaviours and leisure activities.

We identified three groups of people who shared similar attitudes and behaviours.

1. [Being a member of an environmental / outdoor organisation \(Members\)](#)
2. [Taking part in outdoor leisure activities \(Outdoor Leisure\)](#)
3. [Different age groups \(Older/Younger People\)](#)

Where differences between these groups are mentioned, they are statistically significant.

Are people concerned about plant health?

Are plant and tree pests and diseases important?

83%



Globally

76%



Nationally

63%



Locally

63%

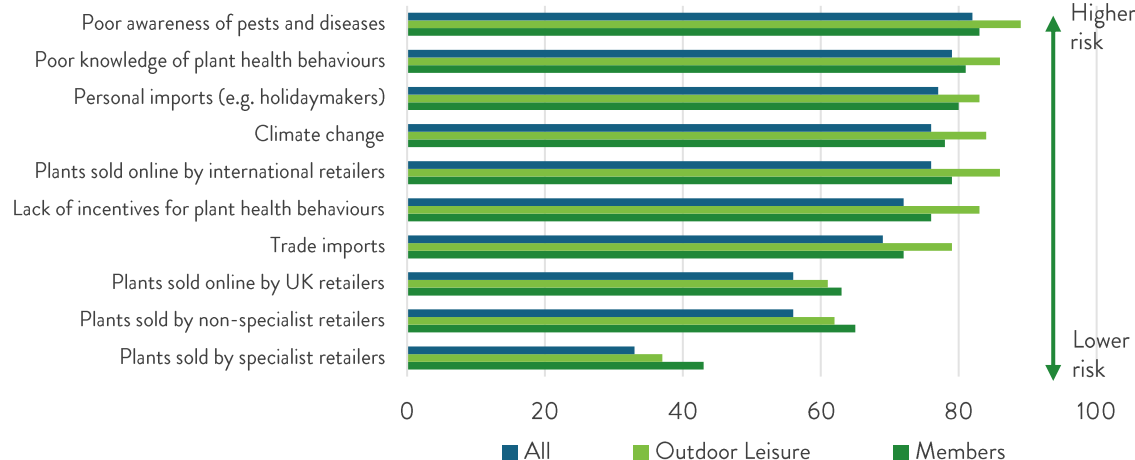


Personally

Members rank personal and local much higher than average.

Outdoor leisure and older people rank all higher than average.

Do you think these issues/activities are high risk for plant/tree health?



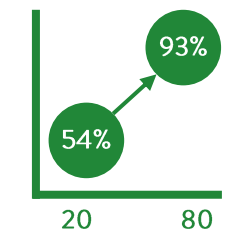
Is it important to protect UK plants and trees from pests and diseases?



87%

outdoor leisure

64% others



Concern increases
with age

Key Points

- Most people agree that it is important to protect plants and trees from pests and diseases. Older people, members and outdoor leisure are more concerned.
- Global and national issues matters more than personal or local issues.
- Individual behaviour, lack of knowledge and climate change are considered the highest risk issues.
- Members are more likely to believe that retail/trade poses a higher risk.

How much do people know about plant health?

Are you familiar with the term 'biosecurity' and do you understand what it means?



29%

have NEVER
heard it before



Only 5%
know exactly
what it means

Only 20% correctly identified false
statements about biosecurity

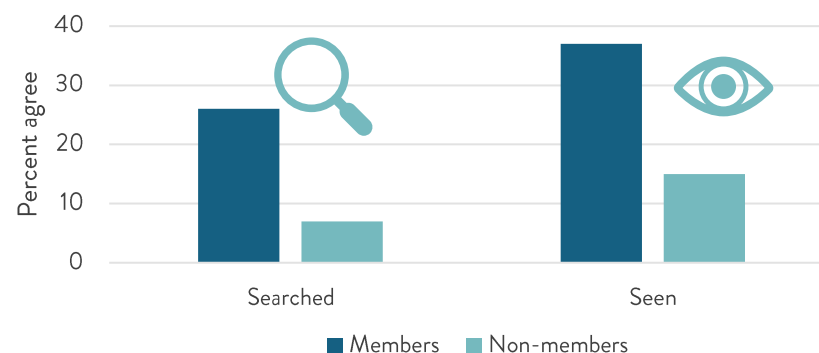
Groups more likely to understand biosecurity include [outdoor leisure](#), [members](#), degree-educated people, [younger people](#) and men.



Key Points

- The term biosecurity is not well understood.
- More educated and interested ([member/outdoor leisure](#)) groups are more likely to understand.
- Most people are neither searching for or seeing information on plant health.

In the last year have you actively searched for or seen information about plant health?



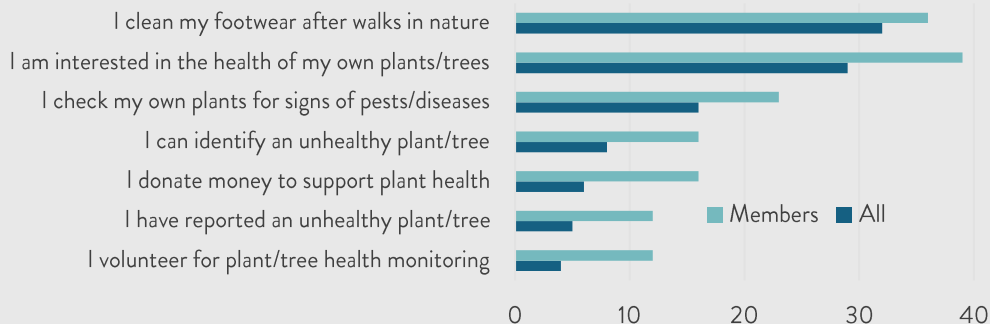
[Younger people](#) are more likely to search, [older people](#) more likely to see

If you have searched, how easy was the information to find and understand?



How are people currently behaving and why?

Do you currently engage in these plant health behaviours?

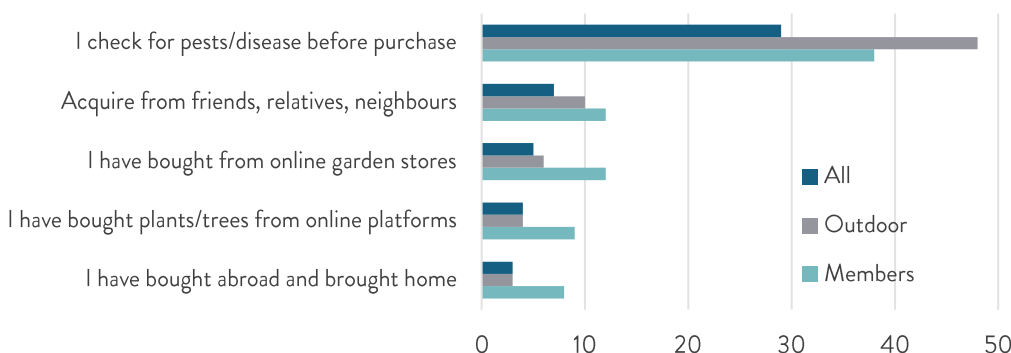


Members are more likely to participate in all activities. Younger people are more likely to volunteer, report infections and donate money. Older people are more likely to care for, check and treat their own plants.

What prevents you from taking action on plant/tree health?



Where do you acquire plants, and do you check them?

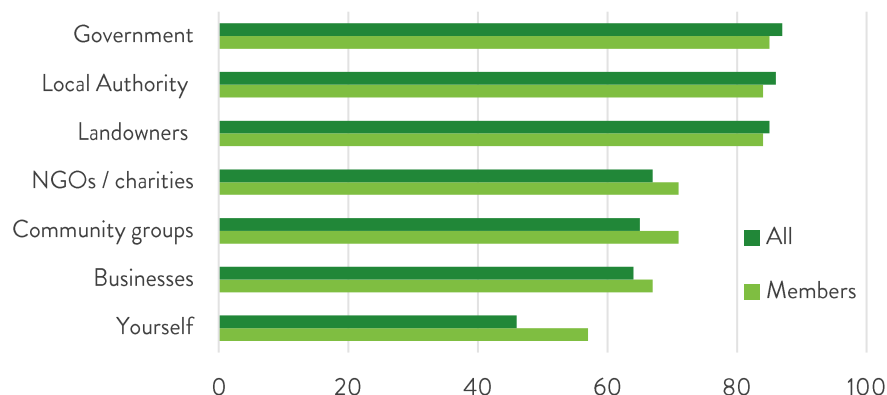


Key Points

- Members and older people are more engaged in general plant care.
- Younger people are more likely to volunteer and donate.
- Members and younger people are more likely to acquire plants online or overseas.
- Lack of knowledge, resources and perceived authority are the biggest barriers to action.
- Members rated personal barriers like 'My actions make no difference' higher than average.

Who do people think is responsible for plant health?

Who do you think is responsible for helping prevent the introduction and spread of plant/tree pests and diseases?



Who is responsible in these situations?



Education

Dealing with
infections

Preventing
spread

High-risk
imports

High-risk
sales

Government

Whoever
owns/looks
after the
land

Local
authority/
Individuals/
Government

Government

Government
/ Businesses

	All	Member	Outdoor	Age
Landowners should be able to close public access to treat pests and diseases	76	76	83	↗
It is everyone's responsibility (including mine) to help protect plant health	68	71	79	↗
Authorities should consult local people on treating or removing plants/trees	62	61	73	→
It is <u>not</u> my responsibility to check where/how the plants I buy have been grown	33	37	29	↘
It is <u>not</u> my responsibility to help tackle plant/tree pests and diseases	31	36	25	↘

Significantly higher than average

Key Points

- Most people expect government, local authorities and landowners to deal with plant health. **Members** also have higher expectations of charities, community groups and businesses.
- **Outdoor leisure participants** are more likely to accept restricted access, but also expect to be consulted.
- **Members** have high expectations of others, but a lower-than-average sense of personal responsibility.
- **Younger people** have a lower sense of personal responsibility, but also lower expectations of others.

What we've learned about general attitudes to plant health



Most people recognise that plants have environmental, aesthetic, economic and recreational value.



People worry most about the impact that plant/tree loss would have on air quality, carbon capture and biodiversity.



People are generally more concerned about global and national plant health problems than personal or local issues.



The concept of biosecurity is poorly understood.



Few people engage with plant pests or diseases beyond their own homes and gardens.



Around 2/3 of people agree that they have some responsibility for plant health.



The biggest barriers to taking action on plant health are a lack of knowledge and having the confidence or authority to act.

Possible Actions

Avoid using the term *biosecurity*.



Put useful information in strategic places e.g. gardening/nature magazines or websites, plant retailers, public parks.

Connect *plant health* messages to better-known environmental issues like *air quality, climate change and biodiversity*.



Ensure *information* about pests and diseases is *easy to find and understand*.



What we've learned about different age groups

Younger People

- Younger people are generally less interested in plant health or concerned about the environment.
- They feel less personal responsibility, but also expect less of others.
- Younger people are more likely to have volunteered, reported an infection or donated money to an environmental cause.
- They are more likely to search for information and buy plants online.

Possible Actions



Online information/engagement perhaps via 'green' public figures

Encourage a *stronger connection to nature* via outdoor recreation and volunteering



Older People

- The older people are, the more they feel connected to nature and concerned about the environment and plant health, including their own plants.
- They feel more personally responsible, but also expect more of organisations like government and local authorities.
- All barriers to taking action decline with age, except being physically able to help which increases.

Possible Actions

Encourage *less physical, more local participation* e.g. donating, lobbying, community gardens



TV, radio and print articles about plant health



Clear information at key times e.g. purchasing/ travel



What we've learned about members of organisations



Being an organisation member (compared to non-members) significantly correlated with responses across a wide range of questions. This group includes people who are members of any pro-environmental organisation including conservation, environmental campaigning, gardening, horticulture, heritage, farming/agriculture and local environment/nature-based community groups.



Members generally take an interest in both their own plants and their local environment. They care more than average about the impact plant or tree loss would have on the look of the landscape and recreational access.



They are reasonably well informed and are more likely than average to understand the term biosecurity. They are also more likely to search for and understand information about plant health.



Due to their interest in gardening, they are more likely to acquire plants abroad or online.



Members have high expectations of government, organisations and businesses for dealing with plant health, whilst taking less personal responsibility. It may be that by joining organisations they feel they have 'done their bit' and they trust others to act on their behalf.

Possible Actions



Target *plant purchasing*
behaviour

Engage via the
membership
organisations
they trust.



Emphasise how
plant health
impacts them
and *their local*
community



What we've learned about outdoor leisure participants



Taking part in outdoor leisure activities (compared to those who don't) significantly correlated with responses across a wide range of questions. This group includes people who actively participate in outdoor leisure activities including sports, nature watching, nature-based creative activities like photography or painting, and visiting gardens.



Compared to others, this group care more about the environment and the potential impact of plant pests and diseases. They rated all risks as higher than average and all the impacts of plant or tree loss as much greater.



They are a well-informed group with a better than average understanding of the term biosecurity. They are the group most likely to check plants are healthy before purchasing.



They have high expectations of both themselves and others to take action on plant health. They would take more action if they felt they had the knowledge or authority to do so.

Possible Actions

Clear information and guidance
at key times e.g. purchasing/ travel



*Encourage
greater
participation*

e.g. active
volunteering,
peer education,
lobbying



*Engage through
nature-based
activities*

