

# Healthy trading

GTN finds out why Plant Healthy is a good idea for retailers.



**G**arden centres at all five RHS Gardens (and the gardens themselves), have now been awarded Plant Healthy Certification. Retail plant outlets only make up a small percentage of the more than 110 horticultural businesses with the award, but their importance in the world of horticulture and the scheme cannot be underestimated.

“Retailers deal in such a wide range of species from multiple sources that they have a huge role to play in protecting plant health,” says Malcolm Catlin, Chief Executive of Plant Healthy.

Representing Plant Healthy at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Malcolm was promoting its benefits to the nation’s gardeners. He is particularly keen for garden centres to consider how the certification can benefit their business and the health of UK gardens and landscapes. “It’s an area we are so keen to promote and gain uptake,” he says.

## What and why

Plant Healthy came from the Plant Health Alliance, created in 2018 and representing the full spectrum of the horticultural industry.

Its remit is to minimise instances of damaging pests and diseases, which are not only devastating but also costly. Research estimates ash dieback could eventually cost the UK just shy of £15bn, with more than half of that figure expecting to occur in the 10 years from 2019. *Phytophthora ramorum* and oak processionary moth alone cost the UK an estimated £6.1 million to manage annually, and although the UK has yet to have a confirmed case of *Xylella fastidiosa*, it’s easy to appreciate the costs to retail and the gardening industry if it was found. Its wide host range encompasses around 650 species including garden favourites lavender, rosemary and olive.

With plant resilience challenged by unpredictable weather, and an RHS report finding that only 39% of the public are aware of the term ‘biosecurity’, the charity Plant Healthy is on a mission to help the horticultural industry do all it can to reduce threats and lead by example.

“First and foremost, we want everybody to be aware of the real need for biosecurity. There are serious threats to plant health, from plant

At the RHS Chelsea Flower Show Malcolm promotes Plant Healthy and its new ambassador Adam Frost.



## Plant Healthy Plant Healthy Certification Scheme

Helping to protect plants, trees and the natural environment



“Plant health is everyone’s responsibility. How Plant Healthy are you? Take our 2-minute quiz.”  
Adam Frost



Scan the QR code to take the quiz.

Your choices matter.  
Together, we can be Plant Healthy.  
[planthealthy.org.uk](http://planthealthy.org.uk)

movement through trade and climate change,” says Malcolm. “The first step is for everybody to be aware of the problem. The second step is to get as many people as possible to act and adopt the good practice that will help prevent problems and where applicable, for people to demonstrate that through certification.

“It’s a rigorous and a demonstrable way of showing your customers you understand the issue and have practices in place,” Malcolm adds.

Full certification may not be appropriate for every business, and if so, there are other steps retailers can take. Malcolm suggests they start by preferring to use plant suppliers with certification, and perhaps in due course, requiring it. If a retailer has its own nursery, it could look at certifying this element.

“For some retailers, Plant Healthy certification might be the best route,” says Malcolm. “If you are a modest sized garden centre chain, and your team has good plant knowledge, it’s completely feasible. And you don’t need to get every site

audited; you can be included in the ‘group scheme’. An external auditor will make an annual visit to a sample of the sites which keeps costs and time manageable.”

Awareness, cost and time are obstacles to Plant Healthy certification, but Malcolm and his team are there to help and provide the guidance to get started. The scheme also offers 1-1 support and e-learning opportunities with documents and templates available.

“In time, we hope to develop some incentives and are currently working on insurance schemes so if there is a nasty problem, businesses with certification could get some financial support. But above all the benefits are protection for your own business. It’s peace of mind and knowing you are doing the right thing. It’s also a way of promoting your business and giving your customers confidence by showing them you’ve gone the extra mile.”

**To find out more visit: [planthealthy.org.uk](http://planthealthy.org.uk)**