

## Genetic engineering could save UK's ash trees

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

Genetically modified ash trees could replace the 80 million expected to die in the next 20 years from a deadly fungus, scientists have proposed.

With no hope of saving existing native ash trees from the “dieback” disease, a [GM](#) solution could develop resistance faster than traditional breeding and start to repopulate woodlands within a few years, say scientists at Queen Mary, University of London.

The fungus, *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (the disease is also known as chalara), has already wiped out 90% of ash trees in Denmark. It was first confirmed in the UK in 2012 and is expected to wipe out 90% of the ash population, which accounts for 20% of all UK trees.

“It’s early days,” said Richard Buggs, lecturer in biological sciences at Queen Mary, who is sequencing the ash tree genome. “We don’t want to invest a lot of effort in developing GM ash trees no one wants.”

“I see GM as one of several possibilities to explore... but I have not formed conclusions on whether it is a good choice or not. My current research is not developing a GM ash; it is simply trying to find genes within the ash genus for resistance to ash dieback,” said Buggs.

“If we discovered that people did not want GM [ash] and rather had no ash there would be no point developing a GM ash... Potentially it could be quicker to develop GM trees resistant to ash dieback. Conventional breeding would take many decades,” he said.

A survey of 1,400 people revealed a mixed reaction to the prospect of GM ash trees, said Oxford University researcher Irina Arakelyan.

**Read full, original post:** [With 90% of the UK's ash trees about to be wiped out, could GM be the answer?](#)