

Goodbye gin and tonics? Invasive plant disease threatens juniper berries used to make gin

The gin industry, which is worth £3.2bn to the UK economy, has the potential to be devastated by an invasive plant disease that is posing a threat to one of the basic ingredients that gives gin its distinctive flavor.

A pathogen called *Phytophthora austrocedri* is spreading through juniper trees in Scotland, which produces 70% the UK's gin The warning comes from none other [than] experts at the Plant Health Center, including Professor Fiona Burnett, from Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).

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The *Phytophthora austrocedri* pathogen entered Britain through the plant trade and may have got into juniper woodlands through well-intentioned planting schemes. It lives in the soil and spreads in both soil and water, infecting juniper roots and killing large numbers of juniper trees especially on wet sites.

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Although gin can be produced from spirits derived from a wide choice of grains, or even potatoes, it relies on juniper berries to give it its traditional, distinctive flavor.

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Luckily for gin drinkers, researchers in Scotland have found that some junipers are resistant to *P. austrocedri* and it is hoped that natural regeneration will allow juniper populations to recover over time.

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