

Vegetable and Fruit production; Nut hazards and control measures

What is the issue

Allergens can cause a wide range of illnesses in people who suffer from an allergic reaction to foods.















This can be from mild effects such as itchiness and reddening of the skin, through to difficulty in breathing and potentially death.

Food allergies happen when the immune system (the body's defence against infection) mistakenly treats proteins found in food as a threat. Over 160 foods are known to be linked to allergic reactions

The symptoms from this perceived threat can be sudden and severe. As a result, several chemicals are released. It is these chemicals that cause the symptoms of an allergic reaction.

Almost any food can cause an allergic reaction, but there are certain foods that are responsible for most food allergies.

There are 14 legally declarable allergens in the UK.

						
Cereals containing gluten	Eggs	Fish	Crustaceans	Peanuts	Soya	Celery
						
Milk	Tree nuts	Mustard	Sesame	Sulphur dioxide	Lupin	Molluscs



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There are 8 tree nuts that are allergenic in the eyes of the law in the UK. These are:

• Almonds.	• Macadamia.
• Brazil nuts.	• Pecan.
• Cashews.	• Pistachios.
• Hazelnuts.	• Walnuts.

Within the UK, hazelnuts and walnuts are commonly found in hedgerows and fields.

	Tree	Unshelled nut	Shelled nut
Walnut			
Hazelnut			

A further issue is that birds can carry nuts when they are flying and drop them into your crops, so a nut tree could be several miles away from your field and still cause an issue.



Be aware of the potential for birds to perch on power lines / cables above crops. There is an increased risk of nuts to be dropped in this area other than in open field areas, so you may need to put bird scaring devices in these areas.



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As you can't eliminate all nut trees from your locality, you need to be aware of the risk and take appropriate measures.

What can you do as a grower to reduce the risk

Understand what nut trees are in your hedgerows and fields.

- You can't control what is outside your own land but knowing what if any nut trees you have on your own land is the starting point.
- Look at the links below to help identify the trees in your hedgerows and fields.
- [A-Z Guide - British Trees - Woodland Trust](#)
- [Identify Trees With Our Tree ID app - Woodland Trust](#)
- If you don't have any nut trees, then the risks are minimal.

If you do have nut trees, mark them on a map / with visible markers so you know where they are even when there are no leaves or tree nuts present.



Identify the risk to the crops you want to grow and determine the risk from a tree nut getting trapped in the edible portion of the crop.

Tree nuts will not enter crops / get trapped in the edible portion of the crop if they are:

- Grown underground.
- Contained with a removable skin.
- Solid and smooth.

Crops such as carrots (solid, underground), potatoes (solid, underground), aubergines (solid and smooth), and peas (contained with a removable skin) have a low risk of a tree nut getting trapped in the edible portion of the crop.



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Tree nuts could enter crops / get trapped in the crop that are:

- Grown above the ground and have leaves that fold over each other.
- Grown above the ground and have leaves that form an open head.
- Grown above the ground that have crinkly leaves.

Crops such as Savoy cabbage (overground, folded leaf), open head lettuce (overground, open head), kale (overground, crinkly leaf) have a risk of nuts getting caught within the edible portion.

Depending on how the crop is used, if tree nuts are trapped, they may not be spotted and could get chopped up and end up in a meal that is eaten by a tree nut allergy sufferer.

Where you want to grow a crop that has a minimal risk of the tree nut entering the edible portion of the crop close to a nut tree, then this shouldn't cause any issues, but if you want to further reduce the risk, you can by:

- Planting and harvesting the crop before nuts are present on the tree.
- Covering the crop with a mesh.

If you want to grow a crop that has a risk of the nut entering / getting trapped in the edible portion of the crop, then you need to take appropriate control measures. These could include:

- Being grown at least 10m away from the nut tree
 - The nuts could drop down or be blown but the risk of them entering the crop is reduced compared to the crop being grown directly under the nut tree.
- Grown under a mesh cover.
 - The nuts could drop down or be blown but there should be no way of the nut from entering the crop. Staff need to be aware to check the mesh and carefully remove the mesh without handling the nuts (or remove the nuts and then wash hands) to prevent the nuts from entering the crop.



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- Plant closer to the nut tree but harvest the crop before the nuts are present.
 - This will require an understanding of when nuts are likely to be present in the field.

Due Diligence Records

In most scenarios in UK law, you are innocent until proven guilty.

However, in food law, you are guilty and must prove that you or the company you work for is innocent.

This is the basis of Due Diligence Defence.

Due Diligence defence is defined as taking all reasonable steps by a person / company to avoid committing an offence.

Due diligence means that the food safety control systems are fully operating, checked and, where necessary, rectified.

Due diligence is the main defence under food safety law if a business is involved in a safety incident involving its food which could lead to prosecution.

Many of the actions that you can take are practical measures. Make sure that you record down the actions you plan to take in the Small Growers Spreadsheet and allergen policy*.

Take pictures of control measures in place and make records of checks performed.

This will all add to your due diligence evidence should there ever be an issue with tree nut contamination in your crops.

*Quality Assurance schemes provide a set of standards to work towards, that aim to provide due diligence to the producer and buyer. Farming Connect Horticulture offers access and



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support, to a bespoke Small Growers Standard for Welsh commercial growers. If you would like further information on this, please contact Horticulture@lantra.co.uk



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