



220M

Europeans live in
small and medium-
sized cities



FREE3



FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM MUNICIPALITIES

Protecting the trees that protect small towns

Practical biosecurity steps for towns without a dedicated arborist or plant health officer.



01 / WHY IT MATTERS

Urban trees are public health infrastructure

They cool streets, soak up stormwater and support wellbeing and biodiversity. These benefits are under growing pressure from invasive pests and pathogens, which often arrive with traded plants and planting material.

2-8°C

cooler surfaces under urban trees during summer heatwaves

Schwaab et al., 2021

30%

tree cover could avert a significant share of heat-related deaths in 93 European cities

lungman et al., 2023

10x

cheaper to prevent a pest than to control it once established

Hulme, 2021; European Commission, 2021

THE 3-30-300 RULE

Konijnendijk, 2023

3

trees visible from every home

30%

canopy cover in every neighbourhood

300 m

to the nearest quality green space

None of these targets holds if trees are lost to preventable pests and diseases.

Four pests every town should know

Examples named in the policy brief. Start with the pests that attack the tree species your municipality plants most.



Ash dieback

Hymenoscyphus fraxineus

A fungal disease killing ash trees across Europe.



Oak processionary moth

Thaumetopoea processionea

Strips oak foliage. Its caterpillar hairs irritate skin, eyes and airways.



Emerald ash borer

Agrilus planipennis

A wood-boring beetle that can kill an ash tree within a few years.



Xylella

Xylella fastidiosa

A bacterium with hundreds of host plants. It has devastated olive groves in southern Italy.

Why small towns are exposed

Large cities employ arborists and plant health officers. Most small and medium municipalities do not, which leaves three gaps.



Information

Guidance is technical and rarely written for a parks officer.



Monitoring

New outbreaks are spotted locally, but there is no clear way to report them.



Procurement

Tenders often favour price over the plant health of new stock.



03 / WHAT TO DO NOW

Six practical steps for any municipality

No specialist team required. Each step builds on what a small local authority already has.

01

Know your priority threats

Check national plant health bulletins and decision-support platforms for pests present in or near your region.

02

Set up a simple monitoring routine

Name one responsible officer, such as a parks manager, and walk your public trees once a year. Record what you find.

03

Turn residents into early warning sensors

Promote iNaturalist, ObsIdentify or national reporting apps so citizens can flag suspicious symptoms.

04

Secure your supply chain

Ask suppliers for valid EU plant passports and add plant health criteria to tender specifications.

05

Connect to networks

National Plant Health Authorities must give technical help on request. Share data, expertise and equipment with nearby towns.

06

Diversify what you plant

Follow the 10-20-30 rule: no more than 10% of one species, 20% of one genus, 30% of one family.

A One-Stop Shop for resilient, future-proofed urban treescapes

FREE3 turns UB3Guard research into practical tools for municipalities, tree managers and the green industry.

QGIS plugins

Run pest risk assessments on your own tree inventory, directly on the map.

RShiny app

Runs alongside QGIS and turns risk results into ready-to-use graphs and reports.



31
countries

183
tree inventories

8.3M
trees analysed

No small municipality needs to act alone.

Pilot countries: Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Serbia and North Macedonia.



Bring FREE3 to your town

Scan the code or visit ub3guard.eu to learn more and get in touch with the team.