

Estates boost demand for walnut

Ash dieback disease has sparked a big increase in demand for walnut trees from a Kent grower.

"With ash dieback creeping into part of estates' forestry plans, they are very much looking at these walnut timber selections," said Alexander Hunt, who runs the Walnut Tree Company from Potash Farm in Kent.

Mr Hunt also has walnut fruiting selections which he sells to garden and commercial customers. His modern hybrid walnut timber varieties take up to 50 or 60 years to produce good stands of timber which tend to be of a lighter wood or grain. "This meets the modern demand for veneers which are lighter rather than darker," Mr Hunt explained. More traditional common or black walnut varieties can take between 70 or 80 years before useful stands are ready. "The time taken to produce stands is another great attraction for these estates," Mr Hunt continued. "We bring in modern varieties – quite a few of which are French – and grow them on here."

For about eight years now, the Walnut Tree Company has been supplying the Sherborne Castle Estate in Somerset with timber selections. "We are gaining a large following from

that sort of customer."

Mr Hunt was among the party which visited Edward Barham's Hole Park estate in Kent to discuss the grey squirrel threat – the subject of another article in this feature. Mr Hunt said he had not seen greys stripping bark from walnut trees. "It is more the nuts that they go for!"

Over the years, Mr Hunt has developed the farm into a specialist cobnut growing business, selling Kentish cobnuts, almonds, chestnuts, pecan nuts, walnuts and gifts based on the Kentish cobnut.

This year, Mr Hunt has two new products for the 2013 nut season - Ghana milk chocolate coated roasted cobnuts that complement the Ecuador plain version. They are called Platinums Kentish Cobnuts and as a result of the small area of crops grown are limited in supply. The second product is chocolate and cobnut fudge. The chocolates and fudges produced by Potash Farm are available locally at The Chocolate Shop in Sevenoaks and The Chocolate Umbrella in West Malling.

As well as the walnut selections, Mr Hunt supplies cobnut, almond and sweet chestnut trees and he gives specialist advice for garden, orchard, forest and amenities/landscape uses.



Alexander Hunt