



**Responsible sourcing scheme for growing media**

Rules V4.0

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# 1 Scope of the Scheme

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) encompasses growing media products and related materials used in the horticultural industry. The scheme applies to products that align with its principles of environmental responsibility and sustainability, including but not limited to:

## Products Covered

### 1. Growing Media Products

- This includes multi-purpose composts, specialist mixes such as seed and cutting composts, ericaceous composts, and other formulations designed for specific horticultural needs.

### 2. Growbags and Planting Bags

- Examples include pre-filled growbags for crops like tomatoes and other planting solutions tailored for horticultural use.

### 3. Materials for DIY Growing Media

- Materials such as peat, bark, coir, perlite, and vermiculite, which are commonly used to create custom growing media mixes.

### 4. Soil Improvers and Conditioners

- Products such as farmyard manure, soil conditioners, and composts designed to improve soil health and fertility.

### 5. Surface Mulches

- Includes products like bark, wood chip, and other materials used to cover and protect soil surfaces.

The products listed here are examples and do not represent an exhaustive list of items covered by the scheme.

## Exclusions

The scheme does not include materials used in volumes of less than 5% by volume within a growing media product.

## 2 Application Process

Membership of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) is open to all organisations involved in the manufacturing, growing, and retailing of grower media products. Other organisations may join as scheme supporters.

### 2.1 Eligibility

- Membership is open to:
  - **Manufacturers** of growing media substrates.
  - **Retailers** of growing media products.
  - **Growers** who use growing media substrates in their operations.
  - **Supporters** of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme's aims.
- There are no specific pre-conditions for membership, and applicants may begin the process at any time.

### 2.2 Steps to Apply

1. **Access the Membership Form:**
  - Download the form from the "Key Documents" section of the RSS website, or
  - Contact the Scheme Administrator to request the form directly.
2. **Complete the Membership Form:**
  - Provide all required details, including company information, contact details, and the type of membership being applied for.
3. **Sign the Membership Agreement:**
  - After submitting the membership form, applicants will receive the RSS Membership Agreement.
  - Review, sign, and return the agreement to the Scheme Administrator.
4. **Pay the Membership Fee:**
  - Membership fees vary based on turnover and membership type and are detailed on the membership application form.
  - Fees for independent audits are organised and paid separately to the appointed third-party auditor.

### 2.3 Membership Year

- Membership runs from 1 January to 31 December. Fees are prorated based on the date of joining:
  - **Jan–Mar:** Full price.
  - **Apr–Jun:** 75%.
  - **Jul–Sep:** 50%.
  - **Oct–Dec:** 25%.

## **2.4 Approval and Onboarding**

- Applications are reviewed by the Scheme Administrator, who ensures all forms and agreements are completed.

## **2.5 Audit Overview – what will happen?**

- Audits are conducted by an independent third-party auditor appointed by the scheme. The auditing process evaluates:
  - Compliance with the scheme's technical requirements.
  - Responsible sourcing of materials used in growing media products.
  - Record-keeping and adherence to action plans.

## **2.6 When Will I Be Audited?**

1. **Initial Audit:**
  - Manufacturers must complete an audit within 12 months of joining the scheme to move from provisional to accredited membership.
2. **Re-Audits:**
  - Full audits are conducted every three years to ensure continued compliance.
3. **Surveillance Audits:**
  - Spot-checks or additional audits may be conducted as needed, particularly if concerns about compliance arise.

## **2.7 Preparing for the Audit**

To ensure a smooth audit, members should prepare the following documentation:

- **Sourcing Records:** Evidence of where and how raw materials are sourced including full supply chain mapping.
- **Product Documentation:** Details of substrates and mixes used in growing media products.
- **Action Plans:** Updated plans showing progress towards meeting responsible sourcing targets.

## **2.8 During the Audit**

- The auditor will review the submitted documentation and may request additional information.
- A site visit may be conducted to verify compliance.
- The auditor will assess compliance using the scheme's scoring criteria, as outlined in the Scheme Rules.

## **2.9 After the Audit**

Members will receive a summary report from the RSS Administrator including the auditor's findings and scoring results.

## 3 Membership

### 3.1 *Manufacturer membership*

Manufacturer Members of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) must adhere to the following criteria to maintain their membership status:

#### 3.1.1 Initial Audit:

- Complete a full audit of all growing media components/substrates **within 12 months of** joining the scheme.

**3.1.2 Annual Confirmation:** Each year, Manufacturer Members are required to submit written confirmation to the Scheme Administrator, which includes:

- Verification that any previous substrate audit scores remain unchanged.
- Confirmation that no significant changes have been made to the materials or substrates used in their product.
- Assurance that the list of products displayed on the RSS website is accurate and up to date.
- Documentation of the current substrate mixes used in their growing media products.
- Confirmation of compliance with the P7 protocol, as applicable for products intended for the amateur market.

#### 3.1.3 Re-Audit:

- Every three years, Manufacturer Members must complete a comprehensive re-audit of all substrates to ensure ongoing compliance with RSS standards. This ensures that all materials continue to meet the responsible sourcing criteria.

#### 3.1.4 P7 Protocol:

- Manufacturers producing products for the amateur market are required to participate annually in the P7 protocol, ensuring their products meet the required performance standards. Details are available in **Appendix A**.

#### 3.1.5 Use of the RSS Logo:

- For guidelines on the use of the RSS logo, refer to the “Use of the RSS Certification Logo” section.

#### 3.1.6 Record Keeping and Reporting:

- Submit an Action Plan annually, detailing how targets for improving responsibly sourced materials are being met.

### 3.2 *Retailer Membership*

Retailer Members of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) are primarily focused on promoting the scheme’s principles and demonstrating their commitment to environmental responsibility. They must adhere to the following criteria to maintain their membership status:

#### 3.2.1 Use of the RSS Logo:

- For guidelines on the use of the RSS logo, refer to the “Use of the RSS Certification Logo” section.

### 3.2.2 Compliance for Own-Brand Products:

- Retailers wishing to use the **RSS logo** on their **own-brand products** must ensure these products are audited in accordance with the scheme's standards.
- Evidence of compliance must be provided to the Scheme Administrator before the logo is applied to **any own-brand product**.
- Once compliance is confirmed, the retailer may use the RSS logo to indicate responsible sourcing on the approved products.

### 3.2.3 Promotion of the Scheme:

- Retailers are encouraged to actively promote their membership and the principles of the RSS, helping to increase consumer awareness of the importance of responsible sourcing.
- Retailers should highlight the significance of the **RSS logo** as a mark of environmental responsibility, fostering consumer trust and engagement with RSS-compliant products.

## 3.3 Grower membership

### 3.3.1 Use of the RSS Logo:

- For guidelines on the use of the RSS logo, refer to the "Use of the RSS Certification Logo" section.

### 3.3.2 Compliance for Product Categories:

- The following categories of products are eligible to display the RSS Logo:
  - **Pre-mixed growing media** supplied by manufacturers covered by the scheme.
  - **Grower's own mix growing media**, provided that the raw materials are sourced from RSS-compliant manufacturers.
  - **Grower's own mix using materials from other suppliers**, where the grower has joined the scheme as a manufacturer and undergone the audit process.
- Evidence of compliance must be submitted to the Scheme Administrator for products in these categories before the **RSS logo** can be used.

### 3.3.3 Promotion of the Scheme:

- Grower Members are encouraged to actively promote their membership in the RSS and the benefits of responsible sourcing to their customers.
- This includes using the **RSS logo** in marketing materials, discussing the importance of responsibly sourced products, and engaging in **direct communication** with customers about the environmental benefits of their practices.
- By promoting the scheme, Grower Members help to build consumer trust and increase awareness of the importance of sustainable practices in the horticultural industry.

## 3.4 Scheme Supporters

Scheme Supporter Members of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) are businesses or organisations that support the mission and principles of the scheme but are not directly involved in the manufacturing, retail, or growing of horticultural products.

### 3.4.1 Role of Scheme Supporters:

- They play a role in **advocating for the principles** of the scheme, helping to raise awareness of responsible sourcing practices among their networks and stakeholders.

### 3.4.2 Use of the RSS Logo:



- For guidelines on the use of the RSS logo, refer to the “Use of the RSS Certification Logo” section.

#### 3.4.3 No Specific Compliance Requirements:

- Unlike manufacturers, retailers, or growers, Scheme Supporter Members do not have specific audit or compliance requirements.
- Their role focuses on **advocacy** and **awareness**, helping to promote the values of responsible sourcing without being subject to the operational standards of the scheme.

### 3.5 RSS Subscription Rates (as of January 2025)

#### Manufacturer Fees

Turnover	Fee
<5m	£500
£5-10m	£750
£10-25m	£1000
>£25m	£2500

#### Other Fees

Grower	£500
Retailer	£500
Supporters	£500

- 3.5.1** The annual subscription fee is due each January. If payment is not received within 60 days from the invoice date, the RSS Board reserves the right to withdraw the member's certification.
- 3.5.2** Certification procedures for new members will not commence until the initial subscription is paid, and for existing members, new certificates will not be issued until the annual subscription is received. After the first year of membership, an annual subscription will be payable each January.
- 3.5.3** If a member goes into liquidation, their membership is immediately invalidated, and any certification is withdrawn.
- 3.5.4** Former members may reapply for membership in all instances of lapsed membership.
- 3.5.5** A list of Members will be published on the RSS website.
- 3.5.6** All documentation pertaining to the scheme and its membership will be publicly available, promoting transparency and open communication.
- 3.5.7** In the event that the scheme is wound up, any remaining funds, following the settlement of all outstanding costs and liabilities, will be distributed back to the members. The distribution will be calculated based on the original membership contributions. This ensures a fair and proportional return of resources in line with each member's initial investment.

## 4 Use of the RSS Certification Logo

### 4.1 Eligibility for Logo Use

- **Provisional Members:** May use the 'Member' version of the logo on marketing materials but may not use the logo on any products.
- **Accredited Members:** May use the 'Accredited Member' logo on products that meet the scheme's standards, provided all substrates have been audited and approved.

### 4.2 Guidelines by Membership Type

#### 4.2.1 Manufacturers:

- Use the logo on compliant products, packaging, marketing materials and websites.
- Changes to the origin of substrates, or the substrate used in a product require a new audit before the product can be marketed with the accredited logo.

#### 4.2.2 Retailers:

- Use the logo for general promotion to membership of the scheme including websites and marketing material.
- Use the logo on promotional material and own-brand products that meet the RSS standards.
- Provide evidence of compliance to the Scheme Administrator before the logo is applied to any own-brand product.

#### 4.2.3 Growers:

- Use the logo for general promotion to the membership of the scheme including websites and marketing material.
- Use the logo on products using compliant raw materials or custom mixes audited through the scheme.
- The logo may be applied directly to compliant products if raw materials are sourced from RSS-compliant manufacturers or if the grower has undergone an audit as a manufacturer.
- Provide evidence of compliance to the Scheme Administrator before the logo is applied to custom mixes and products.

#### 4.2.4 Scheme Supporters:

- Use the logo in communications, promotional materials, websites, and corporate communications to signify affiliation with the RSS.

### 4.3 Conditions for Use

- The logo must be used in its approved form and colours unless specified otherwise for monochrome printing.
- Members may not use the logo in a manner that implies membership or compliance without proper authorisation.
- The logo must be removed from all materials if membership is suspended or revoked.

#### **4.4 Misuse of the Logo**

- Misuse, including unauthorised use or misrepresentation, is a breach of the scheme's rules.
- Penalties for misuse may include suspension, expulsion, or other actions as outlined in the Non-Compliance section.

#### **4.5 Further Guidance**

- Members must refer to the RSS Brand Guidelines document for detailed specifications on logo usage including colour, and placement requirements.
- The RSS Board reserves the right to review the rules surrounding the use of the RSS logo.

## 5 Compliance Requirements

### 5.1 *initial Audit*

- 5.1.1 Members must complete a full audit of all growing media components/substrates within 12 months of joining the scheme.
- 5.1.2 The audit must be conducted by an approved independent third-party inspector appointed by the scheme.

### 5.2 *Annual Confirmation*

- 5.5.1 Members are required to submit an annual written confirmation to the Scheme Administrator that includes:
  - Verification that any previously audited substrate scores remain accurate and unchanged.
  - Confirmation that no significant alterations have been made to materials or substrates in their products.
  - A declaration that the list of products displayed on the RSS website is up-to-date and accurate.
  - Documentation of current substrate mixes used in their growing media products.
  - Assurance of compliance with the P7 protocol for products intended for the amateur market (if applicable).

### 5.3 *Re-Audit Requirements*

- 5.3.1 Members must undergo a comprehensive re-audit every three years to ensure ongoing compliance with RSS standards.
- 5.3.2 The re-audit will verify that all materials and processes meet the responsible sourcing criteria.

### 5.4 *P7 Protocol Compliance*

- 5.4.1 Manufacturers producing products for the amateur market are required to participate in the P7 protocol annually.
- 5.4.2 The P7 established performance standards for amateur growing media, ensuring consistent quality and adherence to responsible sourcing principles.
- 5.4.3 Manufacturers must conduct trials following the methodology outlined in Appendix A: **P7 Protocol Standards**, documenting results and maintaining records for a minimum of three years.
- 5.4.4 Reports must be submitted to the Scheme Administrator within the specified timeframe.

### 5.5 *Action Plans*

- 5.5.1 Members are required to submit an annual Action Plan detailing:
  - Targets for improving the proportion of responsibly sourced materials.
  - Strategies for achieving these targets, including timelines and measurable outcomes.

- Progress updates against the previous year's targets.

### **5.6 Consequences of Non-Compliance**

- 5.7.1** Failure to meet compliance requirements may result in suspension or expulsion from the scheme, as outlined in the Non-Compliance section.
- 5.7.2** Non-compliant members must cease using the RSS logo and remove it from all products and marketing materials until reinstated.

### **5.7 Inspection and Monitoring**

- 5.8.1** All compliance claims are subject to independent verification by third-party inspectors.
- 5.8.2** The Scheme Administrator reserves the right to conduct spot-checks and additional audits if concerns about compliance arise.
- 5.8.3** The scheme appoints third-party auditors as necessary.

## 6 Scoring and Assessment

### 6.1 Scoring Bands

Compliance with the RSS is assessed using a weighted scoring system. Each product is assigned a score based on its alignment with the scheme's principles. The scoring bands are as follows:

Score Band	Weighted Score Achieved
A	> 101
B	93–100.9
C	85–92.9
D	77–84.9
E	< 77

### 6.2 Example Score Calculation

Detailed scoring examples are available in the RSS **Guidance Notes Working Document**.

### 6.3 Importance of Scoring

The scoring system ensures:

- Uniformity and fairness in compliance assessments.
- A clear benchmark for members to improve their products.
- Transparency for manufacturers, retailers, and growers in evaluating performance.

## 7 Non-Compliance

### ***7.1 Non-Conformance with Scheme Requirements***

- 7.1.1 Initial Notification:** If a member fails to comply with the audit requirements, the **Scheme Administrator** will notify them in writing. This notification will be issued under the following circumstances:
- 7.1.1.1** Failure to complete the **initial audit within 12 months** of joining the scheme.
  - 7.1.1.2** Failure to provide the **annual written confirmation** that their audit status remains up to date.
  - 7.1.1.3** Failure to complete a **full audit of substrates every three years** as required by the scheme.
  - 7.1.1.4** Failure to pay the subscription invoice within 60 days of issuance.
  - 7.1.1.5** A scheme member brings the scheme into disrepute.
  - 7.1.1.6** The board receive a letter of complaint relating to a member of the scheme that is deemed valid by the board.
- 7.1.2 Corrective Action Period:** Upon receiving the notification, the member will be given a **30-day period** to provide the required documentation or take steps to address the non-compliance issue.
- 7.1.3 Suspension and Restricted Use of the RSS Logo:** If the member does not comply within the **30-day period**, their membership may be **suspended temporarily**. During this suspension, the member must **cease promoting themselves as RSS-compliant**.
- 7.1.4 Expulsion:** Continued non-compliance beyond 30d days from the suspension period will result in **expulsion** from the scheme. Expelled members must remove the RSS logo from all **new packaging, websites, and promotional materials** within **60 days** of expulsion.
- 7.1.5 Right to Appeal:** Members facing suspension or expulsion may submit a written appeal to the **Board of Directors** within **14 days** of receiving the decision. The Board will review the appeal and issue a final decision within **30 days**.

## **8 Complaints and Appeals Procedure**

- 8.1** All complaints must be referred to the RSS Administrator who will log details and investigate them.
- 8.2** Complaints will be investigated and dealt with by the RSS Board.
- 8.3** All appeals and disputes may be made in writing to the Chair of the RSS Board. The RSS Board will aim to investigate and deal with the appeal. However, if an amicable agreement cannot be reached then this will be referred to an independent panel made up of 3 members not directly involved or impacted by the dispute. The appellant will be given the opportunity to formally present their case. The decision of this panel will be final.



## Appendix A – P7 Protocol Standards

### **Growing trial methodology for performance standard for amateur growing media-DEFRA P7-adopted methodology.**

#### **Objective**

Following on from the DEFRA White paper in 2011 work packages were established. Of these work packages the following project was determined: P7 Performance standards for amateur products. The aim was to produce a performance standard, initially, for multipurpose growing media with other products to be included during later phases of the project.

The method below is based on the EN standard: EN16086-1:2011, with minor adaptations.

It was agreed through earlier work to use tomato (F1), and petunia (F1 other than 'white') as the test species.

#### **Method to be followed:**

According to the EN method:

A 100% peat control will be used throughout. A medium grade peat (such as 0-12mm grade) will be used for potting on of the plants as control, which will be lime adjusted to a pH range of 5.5-6.0 and have a standard base fertiliser, (such as 15-10-20 TE) added at 1.5 g/l. Note the fertiliser is as suggested in the EN method. A wetting agent added as per normal procedure.

[It is recommended that one of the GMA members involved in the testing and audit process agree on an annual basis to manufacture 1m<sup>3</sup> of the control mix which is then sent to other members for them to use as the control for the coming years trials.]

Note: - 5 litres of the control substrate and the MP used in the test will be bagged up and kept for 12 months from the test, should there be a need for a repeat test after an audit.

#### **Test procedure and crops:**

Replicates: 5 pots X 3 reps of the test material (e.g. Multi-purpose compost submitted for responsible sourcing audit)

Saucers will be used for all pots as in the EN method.

Control: 5 pots X 3 reps

The trial is to be randomized on a bench, using lights if required.

#### **Tomatoes (F1)**

Tomato seeds (F1) are to be sown into cellular modular trays (1cmx1cm) in a peat based seeding substrate.

Seedlings at first true leaf stage, one per pot, are then pricked off into pots (9cm/3inch dia) filled with the test material, (Multi-Purpose compost submitted for the responsible sourcing audit). A peat-based control will be used - See above.

#### **Petunia plugs (F1, preferably not white)**

Plugs, one per pot, are then inserted into pots (9cm/3" dia) filled with the test material, (Multi-Purpose compost submitted for the responsible sourcing audit). A peat-based control will be used - See above.

Watering: according to the EN method this will be done in respect of the plant requirement to meet good practice. Watering only no liquid feeding to be used as we are evaluating the product itself.

Glasshouse conditions: 20 by day and min of 16 by night.

Lights: as required

Assessment: tomato: 1<sup>st</sup> truss flowers in the control, petunia: 2 weeks after first flowers opening in the control, 4-6 weeks approx. in total.

- Fresh density, % moisture, pH, EC, NH<sub>4</sub>N, NO<sub>3</sub>N, P and K of each sample test material and control at the beginning and end of the trial
- Flowering date (petunia)
- Number of flowers (petunia)
- Fresh weight (tomato and petunia)
- Photographs of each treatment:
  - 2 pots of each treatment beside 2 pots of the control for each photo.
  - Plants need to be in exactly the same position each time for comparison's sake, preferably against a 5cm square scaled background.
  - Mount a camera on a tripod so that camera angle remains constant.
  - Best use a white or pale blue background for contrast.
- Report to include procedure followed, plant data, stat analysis of data including graphs, and photographs, conclusions, within 4 weeks of the end date of the trial.

The trial results will be available for audit purposes and kept on file by the manufacturer, for at least 36 months.

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