

Horticulture sector unites to boost peat-free gardening

New guide and free expert advice to using peat-free compost launches

As the growing season approaches, a coalition of expert organisations - retailers, manufacturers, growing media manufacturers, growers, conservation charities, and trade bodies - have united to create clear guidance on how to grow successfully using peat-free compost in a bid to help accelerate the UK's transition away from peat.

The 20 organisations, brought together by environmental innovator Sizzle, include DEFRA, the Horticultural Trades Association, Garden Centre Association, British Growers Association and the RHS.

This comes in the wake of recent legislative delays¹ and new research commissioned by Sizzle² which reveals that while 67% of gardeners care about sustainable composts, only 30% say they consistently buy peat-free.² This new guidance seeks to close this gap and make it easier for gardeners to make sustainable choices.

Lack of education and familiarity with how to use peat-free compost are key barriers. The research suggests over one in five gardeners (from novices to experts) are confused about the differences between compost types and what makes them sustainable. Additionally, 43% of gardeners stick to composts they know, a trend especially prevalent among those over 55 and more experienced gardeners.

The new guidance aims to alleviate these concerns, giving consumers advice on choosing the right compost for their needs and addressing common issues with peat-free products, including overwatering, underfeeding and incorrect storage.

Increasing the use of peat-free compost is essential as peat extraction is highly damaging to the environment. Peatlands are the world's largest carbon store,³ with the UK as a leading

1 on the prohibition of sales of peat and peat-containing products . On 6th November 2024, Sarah Dyke, Liberal Democrat MP for Glastonbury and Somerton, put forward the Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill. Under plans outlined in the Bill, there would be a ban on selling horticultural peat by the end of 2025*with exemptions to allow for a phased, fair transition for professional growers.* Having passed its first reading, the Bill was due to be presented in more detail at its second reading on Friday 24th January, where MPs were to decide whether it can proceed to the next stage, however this has been delayed until the 4th July 2025.) <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/news/somerset-wildlife-trust-urge-uk-government-fulfil-promise-ban-sale-peat>

2 Conducted for Sizzle Innovation, an organisation which explores fresh solutions to tackle environmental and social challenges, by Censuswide, July- August 2024, among a sample of 3002 Respondents with access to a garden, broken down into limited, amateur, keen to knowledgeable gardeners. The data was weighted against the gender/age/region fallout of a nationally representative sample of 2,002 UK adults who have access to a garden, collected between 09.08.2024-12.08.2024. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.

3 <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/last-chance-ban-sale-peat>. Analysis of the failure of voluntary measures to halt peat use in UK horticulture between 1990 and 2020, Nigel Doar, Head of Science & Research, The Wildlife Trusts February 2022, <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/last-chance-ban-sale-peat>

contributor to emissions from their degradation.⁴ Sadly, over 80% of our peatlands are damaged,⁵ and these ecosystems are critical for biodiversity, with 1 in 6 species now at risk of extinction.⁴ Despite this and 88% of amateur gardeners supporting a complete retail sales ban on peat-based products, many gardeners continue to buy peat-based compost.⁵

Nature Minister, Mary Creagh, said: "Our peatlands play a crucial role in our ecosystems, acting as our largest terrestrial carbon store, as well providing vital habitats for our wildlife.

"This kind of collaboration across the horticulture sector is key to protecting our peatlands for the future. Gardeners are keen to do their bit to preserve our wonderful landscapes and this new guidance will help to bridge the knowledge gap and make peat free gardening achievable."

Peter Burks from The Garden Centre Association exclaimed "The Garden Centre Association is determined to provide our customers with the best advice on how to use these new peat free composts successfully. It is so important for all gardeners to have confidence in the products that are now available to them to ensure they continue having a great time growing plants in their homes and gardens."

Professor Alistair Griffiths, RHS Director of Science and Collections, remarked "It is a really positive step to have come together with so many organisations to help provide these top tips for gardeners, to make sure they can grow successfully peat-free. At the RHS, we know the simple action of choosing peat-free compost keeps peat in the ground, where it has a vital role in storing carbon, regulating water in the landscape and as a habitat for wildlife. Gardeners can follow this guidance on the leaflets to get the best from peat-free compost and take an important action for our planet.

Andy Smith at The Responsible Sourcing Scheme added "Providing accessible, accurate information about peat-free composts is essential to building consumer confidence and supporting a successful transition to more sustainable gardening practices. By working collaboratively with retailers, manufacturers, NGOs, and industry bodies, we can help ensure that gardeners receive the guidance they need to select and use peat-free products effectively."

The guidance will be rolled out starting 18 February at The Garden Press Event.

What can you do to help share education on peat-free practices?

Help us to raise awareness of this new guidance, which can be found [here](#) or download and share our [social media graphics](#) and [leaflet](#) using the hashtag **#PeatFreeSuccess** so that achievements and / or questions from the public can be tracked to continuously improve the advice provided.

For bespoke advisory email support on peat-free gardening contact:
peatfree@rhs.org.uk.

— ENDS —

⁴ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/uk-government-confirms-ban-all-peat-based-gardening-products-will-not-be-implemented-until>

⁵ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/soils-and-peatlands/endingtheretailsaleofpeatinhorticulture/>

Notes to Editors

1. The following organisations have formally committed to being part of the educational guidance partnership:

- Agriton Group
- British Growers Association
- Bulrush Horticulture Ltd
- DEFRA
- Durston Gardening Products Ltd
- Evergreen Gardening
- The Farplants Group
- Garden Centre Association
- Gardens Group
- Garden Organic
- Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)
- Melcourt Industries Ltd
- Peat Free Partnership
- Responsible Sourcing Scheme for Growing Media
- Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)
- Sipcam Home & Garden
- Sizzle Innovation
- SJB Quality Consulting Ltd
- Social Farms and Gardens Association
- Southern Trident

2. Further partnership quotes:

Durstons remarked: "We are committed to driving innovation and evolving our business for a sustainable future. Recognising the necessity of a peat-free future, we have made this transition a core focus, ensuring it underpins every aspect of our operations. This commitment is shaping the long-term direction of our business, reinforcing our dedication to sustainability and success.

To make this transition a success, I have actively built strong relationships with industry experts, suppliers, and like-minded professionals, working closely to refine the perfect balance of high-quality raw materials and bespoke fertiliser formulations. These innovations ensure our next-generation growing media products deliver top-tier performance, making the switch to peat-free seamless for consumers. As part of this, I have become deeply passionate about education and believe in raising awareness of peat-free alternatives, ensuring consumers have the confidence to achieve the same - if not better - results in home growing."

Evergreen said "Evergreen Garden Care is fully committed to the transition to Peat Free gardening – not only in helping gardeners with advice on to grow better, but also in providing the confidence that the peat free compost they choose from Miracle Gro or Levington will nurture growing without compromise whatever they are growing. Our transition to peat-free compost has been a journey of innovation and investment to get to a place where performance is unrivalled and gardening can truly be both sustainable and successful, protecting our precious peatlands. We are shaping the future of gardening in a way that's good for the planet and great for home gardens."

Jennifer Brown, Marketing Manager at The Farplants Group said: “Farplants is committed to sustainable growing practices. We are actively reducing peat use and exploring high-quality, peat-free alternatives. We collaborate with industry partners to overcome challenges and ensure a reliable supply of environmentally-friendly substrates for our production needs.

We recognise that the challenges we face as professional growers are mirrored and often compounded for an unsuspecting public. Education and clear communication are essential to overcoming these issues.”

Fiona Taylor, Garden Organic CEO commented “Garden Organic is pleased to join this partnership. We’ve been campaigning to eliminate peat from horticulture for several decades - peatlands are running out of time and we need action now to stop the degradation of this precious eco-system just for the sake of our gardens and garden plants. Gardening should be about giving back to nature, nurturing plant diversity and soil health, and recycling through home composting. It’s still a confusing marketplace for gardeners trying to do the right thing so we’re thrilled to see this coalition bringing together aligned organisations to share our collective advice and expertise.”

Nigel Thompson, Head of Sales & Marketing at Sipcam commented on joining the campaign: “We’re absolutely thrilled to be support this initiative. Education is key to helping gardeners make the most of peat-free compost, and we’re passionate about providing the knowledge and tools needed for success. By working together, we can support gardeners in making more sustainable choices while ensuring their plants thrive. We can’t wait to contribute to this important movement and inspire more people to grow greener!”

Simon Blackhurst, Project Director and growing media expert at Sizzle said: “We know gardeners want to be more sustainable, but many hesitate to change their habits.¹ Peat-free compost will look, feel and smell different to peat- based compost and needs a slightly different approach which is why our guide offers clear, simple steps to support gardeners at all levels to successfully adopt peat-free practices. It is essential that the information we provide to the public is consistent which is why we are calling on even more organisations to share this advice on their websites, in store and on social media under the hashtag **#PeatFreeSuccess**”

Southern Trident, who is part of the coalition, CEO Steve Harper remarked “We are committed to driving the transition towards sustainable and high-performance peat-free growing media. Clear, consistent messaging is essential to help gardeners make informed choices when selecting and using peat-free compost. We are proud to collaborate with like-minded organisations to address misconceptions, improve education, and ensure that peat-free products are understood and trusted to drive meaningful change across the sector.”^t

3. Peat statistics:

- Peatlands are natural boggy habitats that store over twice as much carbon as all the world’s forests combined, despite covering an area ten times smaller. In fact, peat bogs store twice as much carbon as all the vegetation on the planet put together. This makes them the most efficient carbon sink on land.²
- In 2022, the horticultural industry used 950,000m3 of peat – enough to fill 380 Olympic-

1 Sizzle data conducted by Censuswide, Summer 2024

2 <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/peat>

sized swimming pools.³

- Up to 31 million tonnes of CO₂ released by peat extraction since 1990 – see [here](#).
- Emissions equivalent to 15 million return flights from London to New York – based on emissions from a [return flight](#) amounting to 2 tonnes CO₂e.
- Emissions equivalent to the annual emissions produced by over 7 million cars – [GHG](#) equivalencies calculator: 7,378,056 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year.
- Emissions from peatlands make up [4%](#) of all UK annual greenhouse gas emissions.
- With nearly 5 million acres of peatland, the UK is one of the world's top 10 contributors to emissions from degraded peatlands.⁴
- At least 80% of our peatlands have been damaged. We have to protect what remains.⁹
- Every year emissions from degraded peatlands are equivalent to the carbon footprints of over 1.9 million British citizens.¹⁰
- About 90% of Welsh peatland is in an unfavourable condition due to impacts such as drainage or erosion: [Natural Resources Wales / Danes delight in Welsh peatland restoration](#).

4. Legislation:

In 2022 the UK government pledged to bring in a ban of sale of peat-based products 'by 2024'. However, this policy remained unfulfilled at the time of the 2024 General Election and there is still no clear timetable for legislation. Ending the use of peat in professional horticulture by 2030 remains part of the UK's 25-Year Environment Plan.⁵

³ <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/news/somerset-wildlife-trust-urge-uk-government-fulfil-promise-ban-sale-peat>

⁴ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/uk-government-confirms-ban-all-peat-based-gardening-products-will-not-be-implemented-until>

⁵ <https://www.edie.net/ask-edie/?q=When%20will%20the%20UK%20Government%20introduce%20legislation%20to%20end%20peat%20sales%3F&q=177797>