

Why Choose Peat-Free Compost ?

Peat has been a popular compost material as it is free draining, yet moist, giving near-perfect moisture conditions for seeds and young plants to develop. **BUT it's unsustainable and extracting and using it accelerates climate change.** Its use will be banned from 2024. So it's time to switch. Many peat-free composts and soil improvers are available now and they are improving all the time.

The following tips have been compiled by Gosport and Fareham Friends of the Earth including material from Which?; (<https://www.which.co.uk/news/2021/05/peat-compost-set-to-be-banned-which-peat-free-composts-are-any-good/> - this also includes recommendations about which peat-free compost brands are best – but you have to be a member of Which? to read the results!)

The tips also draw on views from experienced FOE users of peat-free compost: (*read more on this blog:* <https://leicesterfriendsoftheearth.blogspot.com/2021/04/peat-free-gardening-concerns-and-peat.html>)

The Royal Horticultural Society has excellent advice: *“Preferably, choose peat-free compost with good on-label information. Read and follow the instructions on the packaging about the suitability of the mix for particular purposes”*... (more: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=441>)

TIPS FOR USING PEAT-FREE COMPOST

Watering

Peat-free composts require care and attention to watering regimes to get the best results. So:

Pay close attention to how much and how often you water. Sometimes the top of the compost can look dry, but under the surface it's very wet. Conversely some composts can look wet on the surface, but the water hasn't soaked to the middle of the pot, leaving the roots to dry out.

Get used to picking up your pots to discover if they are light, in which case they may need to be watered, or heavy and have enough water. You can also test by pushing your thumb into the top few centimetres of the pot to see how wet or dry it is.

Feeding

Peat itself does not contain the nutrients that growing plants need – they had to be added artificially to peat-based composts. But garden compost and peat-free compost you buy in the shops are full of plant nutrients, just as nature intended. Nevertheless, pots start to run out of feed after three or four weeks. So:

When growing seedlings, prick them out and pot them on before this time so your plants have all the nutrients they need to keep going. If you're going to keep plants in the same pots for longer, give them a liquid feed, or use a controlled-release fertiliser.

Storing your compost

Choose a cool, dry place, and try to use it up within a few weeks. Peat-free composts often start to rot down after a few months and the fertiliser in them breaks down, which might harm your plants. Store it in a shed or garage, but if you don't have these, keep it in a shady spot, covered with a tarpaulin.

Buying

If you can, buy your compost from a retailer who stores it under cover. This will keep it fresh and help you to grow better plants.

Where to buy peat-free compost in Gosport and Fareham.

This list includes suppliers we use or have researched personally; (websites and phone calls) as of August 2021 (+plus updates to May 2022); it also includes information from a national survey conducted by the Wildlife Trusts in April 2021 (for more details see <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-go-peat-free>). It is also possible to find national suppliers on line.

(NB – mention of a supplier here is not an endorsement of quality and users’ reactions vary widely)

Please help add to this list by letting us know of other local stockists.

**The key piece of advice is: Examine the wording on the packet –
If it does not say it is PEAT-FREE, then it isn’t!**

Some retailers only stock peat-free compost:

The Co-op – from April 2021 the only compost they sell is Peat-free (New Horizon);

Dobbies - all their compost sales are peat-free from 2021;

Milk and More – Durstons Multi-Purpose and Durstons Organic Multi-Purpose;

Waitrose –all their composts are peat-free from 2022;

Royal Horticultural Society – any brand endorsed by them is peat-free.

Retailers who include peat-free brands as well as brands still containing peat:

Aldi - Aldi Gardenline Peat-free Compost;

ASDA – Levington’s peat-free and Melcourt’s SylvaGrow (RHS endorsed);

B&Q – several varieties;

Homebase - (own brand and Supagrow);

Lidl - occasionally offers a peat-free compost;

Matthews – Greengrocer: 339 Forton Road, Gosport. PO12 3HF - New Horizon;

Tesco – Alver Village Square, Grange Road, Gosport. PO13 8ZW. They reduced peat in their UK-grown bedding plants by 95% from May 2022 and plan to be completely peat-free by 2023.

The Range - 1, Gunners Way, Brockhurst, Gosport. PO12 4DS (stocks a multipurpose and a specialist vegetable compost, stockist of Earthcycle);

Wickes – own brand Peat Free Multi-Purpose Compost.

Garden Centres:

Alver Valley Garden Centre – opened in Spring 2022 – plans to offer some peat-free composts;

Garsons – yes. (They also have a policy to phase out peat as a growing medium);

Hambrooks – yes - New Horizon peat-free;

Park Place Farm Nursery – yes - Miracle Grow Peat Free;

Stewarts Abbey Garden Centre – Yes. They say: *“Stewarts stocks ... both traditional multipurpose and the newer range of peat free or peat reduced composts which are now of such a quality that the latest Which? reports states that they are better than some of the older peat-based composts.”.*

Nurseries growing plants in a peat-free medium:

Lowaters Nursery, Hook Lane, Warsash. SO31 9HH ;

Paddock Plants, Upper Toothill Road, Rownhams, Soton SO16 8AL.

Household Waste Recycling Centres:

Gosport and Segensworth – sell Pro-Grow peat-free composts and soil conditioners made by Veolia from recycled waste.