

Press release

Thursday 16 December

EMBARGOED to 00:01 Saturday 18 December

“Work with us to phase out peat use, protect the environment and safeguard the UK horticulture industry.” As Defra and the Welsh government launch their ‘Ending Retail Sale of Peat in Horticulture in England and Wales’ consultation, the UK horticulture industry highlights collaboration as the key to solving the issue of peat-use.

The horticulture sector is a green industry at its core and fully supports government ambitions to end the use of peat, an objective it has united to achieve voluntarily through the work of its Growing Media Taskforce. The group spoke out today as Defra officially launched a long-awaited consultation on a proposal to ban peat, saying progress towards succeeding in this ambition will be difficult to sustain without urgent support from government.

“We are an industry that understands the importance of protecting our planet – we produce trees and plants - the essential nature-based solutions to climate change,” said James Barnes, spokesman for the taskforce. “We are committed to taking every realistic step towards ending peat use and earlier this year set out to Defra a comprehensive plan which outlines the action required by industry and, critically, by government, if this ambition is to be realised. Neither a ban nor point of sale taxes will address fundamental problems with availability of alternatives to peat.”

Peat as an ingredient in growing media for the retail market is dropping and is at its lowest since records began in 2011.* Continuing this trajectory is entirely dependent on securing enough volume and quality of alternative materials**. Government action, such as changes to legislation that currently prevent the possibility of waste from the food industry from being explored, is urgently required to unlock the policy barriers standing in the way.

The willingness of the industry to make the switch was highlighted in a recent survey*** of retailers which showed 70 per cent of respondents would consider switching to stocking only peat-free products for retail to the public if alternatives were easily available. It is this issue of availability which presents the biggest hurdle.

“A ban on peat will cause a shortfall of around 1.5 million cubic metres of material that goes into bags of compost for gardeners. It will not help solve the shortage in alternative materials,” explained Barnes.

“Government could make a positive commitment to this by accelerating research and development; efforts to achieve ‘end of waste’ status for recycled materials and action to improve the consistency of household green waste collection. These are untapped sources of an alternative ingredient to growing media.”

The group also fears a point-of-sale tax on bagged growing media will hurt UK gardeners, with consumers better supported to make responsible choices through education rather than point-of-sale charges which will drive up the cost of gardening for those who can least afford it. It points to the forthcoming launch of its industry-led Responsible Sourcing Scheme,

complemented by the development of a learning program to improve garden centres' ability to advise consumers, as proactive ways to support change.

“Positive collaboration with government, not an unnecessary ban, unrealistic timescales and threats of yet more taxes is the key to a horticulture sector without peat. An industry-government partnership would enable UK horticulture to achieve the international competitive-edge and certainty it requires to ‘green our economy’”, Barnes concluded.

“We continue to do everything we can to remove peat, but it needs government to step up to support this change.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

The horticulture industry has already reduced peat to a historic low – 35% in retail – and is committed to removing peat from its operations – 2025-2028 for retail and 2028-2030 for professional nursery plant production. See the [Growing Media Monitor](#) report all for figures and statistics.

*In 2020 the volume of peat alternatives in amateur growing media increased by 50%. Peat accounted for 35.5per cent of the volume of ingredients in growing media sold for retail use.

**Alternative ingredients of growing media could include coir, bark, other wood-based products, composted green waste and other organic ingredients such as sheep’s wool

***Source: HTA independent survey September 2021, Base: 104 retailer members

End-of-waste criteria specify when certain waste ceases to be waste and becomes a product, or a secondary raw material. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/topics/waste-and-recycling/waste-framework-directive_en

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme will see clear improvements to labelling. The scheme which now encompasses at least 85% of the volume manufacturers will clearly identify the components in ‘composts’ and their environmental impacts in an easy-to-interpret design.

Extent of peat in the UK versus extraction for horticulture

	Total peatlands area (hectares)	Estimated area of peatlands used to extract peat for horticulture (2019) (hectares)	Percentage of peatlands extracted (hectares)
UK	2,963,000	1,175	0.04%

This press release sets out the views of the Horticultural Trades Association, the National Farmers Union, the Garden Centre Association, the Growing Media Association along with leading growers and manufacturers.