

## **An Expert's Thoughts on the use of Peat-Free Compost**

Garry Coward, editor of [Amateur Gardening](#) said: "This is the right thing to do for the environment, but peat-free compost is not a like-for-like replacement, so you need to be very careful about what you buy and how you use it."

"Having bought peat compost for years, consumers just think of it as bags of 'dark brown crumbly stuff' that they use for everything from growing seeds, planting containers, baskets, and for soil regeneration.

He continued: "But, they have never had to think about what is actually in that 'stuff' and how its composition needs to be treated to get the best result.

"This ignorance is due to the magic of peat - it retains water evenly and it slowly releases nutrients — you don't really have to do much to it and people have got used to that."

But, by 2024, peat-based compost is due to be entirely phased out, meaning gardeners will have to use the peat-free alternatives instead.

This means when the ban takes place, gardeners will need to understand their compost a whole lot more in order to maintain and sustain thriving gardens.

We spoke to Mr Coward to find out how to choose and use peat-free compost correctly, to get the best out of your plants.

### **Don't buy cheap peat-free!!**

Mr Coward said: "It will be a complete waste of time and your plants and crops will not flourish.

Currently, there is no set standard for the contents of peat-free compost. This means it can contain pretty much anything except peat.

The peat-free options currently on offer consist of anything from green waste (council-processed garden waste from households), fibrous coir (coconut husk, imported from the Indian subcontinent), wood fibre, bracken or sheep's wool.

Mr Coward said: "Most of these materials have benefits, but none of these alternatives directly replicate the core beneficial properties of peat. And these various recipes need to be treated differently.

"A couple of the brands have had good reports and should be tried first but expect to pay twice what you used to as the better stuff is double the Peat based compost it replaces.

He continued: "The days of cheap but effective compost are over - accept it."

## **Choose one brand and stick to it**

Mr Coward said: "Learn how to get the best out of your peat-free compost and use that brand consistently".

"Not all peat-free compost is the same, there are many different recipes of material and it is wise to stick to one."

## **Be careful with watering**

Mr Coward said: "Most peat-free mixes do not hold water evenly like peat compost.

"The top of your container may appear to be bone dry, but the water may have leached to the bottom. This can lead to waterlogging and plant loss. If in doubt, push your fingers into the soil and check."

## **Feed your plants more regularly**

Mr Coward said: "Most peat-free will need extra feeding with liquid plant food because it does not have the same nutrient-holding abilities as peat.

"All quality compost has plant food included but because of peat-free's water-leaching tendencies, the nutrients get washed through with watering quicker, meaning they don't last as long."

## **Environmental issues with coir**

Mr Coward said: "You may wish to avoid any peat-free compost that contains coir, as this has to be shipped from the Indian subcontinent, and there are issues about scarce water resources used to process it and its environmental impact on its place of origin."

On recommendations, Mr Coward believe there are currently two brands that, in his opinion, are best in class.

Mr Coward said: "Sylva Grow, which is RHS recognised and recently gained warrants from The Queen and The Prince of Wales, and Dalefoot, which is a wool-based compost."

## **Conclusion**

Work is continuing to enhance the Peat-Free alternatives, but expect to pay considerably more for the ones that will give the best results.