



# Plastics in Horticulture Recycling & the Taupe Pot

## What is 'The Taupe Pot'?

The Taupe Pot is a polypropylene pot which can be produced by any plastic plant pot manufacturer with the capability to fulfil the required specification. The pot is 100% recyclable and made from as high a percentage of recycled polypropylene (PP) as possible, frequently from a UK source, with little or no virgin material.

The pot is designed to be kerbside recyclable where possible and replace the traditional black plastic plant pot currently favoured as an industry standard by ornamental plant producers.

## What's the Problem with Black?

The black plastic pot cannot be recycled through kerbside collections, due to the inability of PIR sensors at recycling facilities to recognise any plastic which contains a carbon-black pigment.

Actually all PP is recyclable, however the market value of dark PP is low so recyclers prefer not to deal in it. As it can't be sorted automatically, it has to be collected in bulk from collection points. In addition, dark colour PP can only be turned into more of the same thing, rather than a range of colours.

Basically, the lighter the PP colour the easier it is to recycle.

**16 April 2019**

## Who Decided on Taupe?

The taupe pot was selected at a Nursery Working Group meeting, which is a grower-led group. The HTA facilitates the group but does not guide the policy that is decided.

The idea is that any plant producer can ask their chosen pot manufacturer to supply them with a taupe pot, as a replacement for black, as long as it fits the specification. The colour was selected as the most appropriate to replace black.

Therefore, no single manufacturer or grower has any exclusive right over the taupe pot, it is an industry led solution to an issue facing horticulture.

## Consumer Appetite

BBC Gardeners World Magazine have done a piece of research which states that over 75% of the buying public would pay for (within reason) extra efforts towards making plant pots and plastics in horticulture generally more recyclable. This research is available from the HTA, or you can view a pdf of it on our website page explaining the taupe pot initiative.

The pot has been featured on BBC Gardeners World (you can [view the clip here](#) or go on the BBC website. The clip is called "Pot Revolution").

## Is it More Expensive?

Generally, the taupe pot (and any ‘accredited’ non-carbon black pigment pot) is around 25%-30% more expensive to buy. However, this translates into an average of about 1.5%-2% more on the end user price for each plant. The expense relates to the raw material cost of UK-sourced recycled PP, not the cost of making.

Most buying public would probably not even notice this cost increase, and it has been shown that more are likely to accept it without question.

It is also worth noting that the more material goes into the UK waste stream, the more will be available for manufacturers and the cheaper it is expected to be.

An ‘accredited’ pot means it has been tested by RECOUP as being able to go through a recycling facilities PIR sensors.

## Reception by Industry & Consumer

A great many nurseries and retailers have already committed to using the taupe pot to replace black, with a view to replacement within 2 years. The timescale depends entirely on crop production schedules and ongoing individual trials. There are also multiple retailers using the specification, so the public will soon become very aware of the meaning of the colour.

Taupe is a very fashionable colour and is bang on trend, and it also goes with a lot of plant colours. The HTA has compiled some advice on using the colour and what it means to people. You can view the document on [our webpage devoted to the Taupe pot](#).

## The Next Steps

The HTA are working alongside [RECOUP](#) (RECYcling of Used Plastics Limited) - a charity at the forefront of plastic recycling information – to encourage and inform Local Authorities (LA’s), waste processors and consumers about the suitability and desirability of the taupe pot for recycling and getting this messaging right.

We use current [WRAP Guidelines 1.9](#) stating non-black plant pots **can** be recycled. Reference to this can be seen on page 17. These guidelines are for LA’s to follow, and WRAP (Waste Resource Action Programme) is a government supported organisation.

Some councils ban kerbside recycling of plastic plant pots, so the HTA & RECOUP will be working with councils and waste processors to inform them correctly.



All PP (polypropylene) and most PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic in theory can be recycled.

Consumers can take used pots, including black, to their local recycling centre if the LA doesn’t kerbside collect (yet). Current advice is to check.

## Ecogen Collections

Some garden centres are taking part in a collection scheme run by Ecogen to take in used plant pots (whether black or not), pallet them up and send them off to the appropriate waste recycler. Information can be found on the [HTA website](#).

## Other Activities

At the end of November 2018, the taupe pot and the HTA were mentioned in a debate in Westminster Hall on “[plastics in agriculture](#)”. The HTA will follow this up by sending taupe pot samples to all MPs involved or interested in the plastics debate, with a view to raise the profile. The HTA will be lobbying government to make guidelines clearer.

The HTA is also organising a ‘drop-in’ session for Parliamentarians to come along and find out about the taupe pot and sign a pledge in support of the initiative.

The Government published its Resources & Waste Strategy in Dec 2018, and this addresses the issue more closely. The Strategy clearly states the Government’s desire to inform and educate LA’s and create a unified system of recycling identification, collection and reuse.

Several Government consultations were opened, all of which have relevance to plastics & the horticulture industry. The most relevant is “Consistency in Household and Business Recycling Collections in England” which closes on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019. The HTA encourages members to respond, please ask for guidance if required.

The industry has become well known as being in advance of other industries by voluntarily coming up with the taupe pot initiative and taking the messaging forward.

The HTA is also assisting the Nursery Working Group to work with labels and POS manufacturers to come up with a consistent industry message for the use of plastics in that specific field. This will be based on what is realistically possible now, and then look to the future by scanning for new innovations and strategies.

## Summary

The taupe pot represents the best option for recycling at this moment in time.

The ultimate aim for resource management would be to create a circular economy for recycled/recycling plastic within the horticulture industry, which is sourced in the UK, recycled in the UK, re-manufactured in the UK and sold in the UK.

The taupe pot is a start to this, and the industry, facilitated and assisted by the HTA, hopes to build on it in the future.