



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

A Guide to the Responsible Retailing of Growing Media

Introduction

The HTA and GCA have worked together to produce this guide to help retailers develop environmentally and socially responsible approaches to retailing growing media. As a category, growing media is essential to so much that gardeners love in their gardens. Whether it's the 'kerb appeal' of hanging baskets and tubs outside the front door or a child's first attempt at growing their own strawberries, growing media is the vital ingredient.

But in the era of climate change it's hugely important that we take a responsible approach to retailing growing media and sustaining and conserving the materials that go into it. Wasting the scarce and valuable materials that make up our growing media is something we should do everything we can to avoid. This guide is for retailers of growing media, and gives ideas for what retailers can do to promote responsible use of growing media and the materials that go into them, whilst ensuring that the nation's gardeners continue to grow successfully.



Who should use this guide?

The ideas and principles in this guide will be useful to anyone responsible for:

- Buying and ranging decisions for growing media
- Pricing and promotional offers for growing media
- Merchandising, planograms, and overall display relating to growing media products in store
- Training customer service, shop floor and plant area staff who deal directly with shoppers on growing media or soil improver products

Best practice advice for retailing growing media

The following advisory points are designed to help retailers of growing media adopt policies that support greater sustainability in horticulture. The guidance is designed to help reduce peat use, to reduce waste of peat alternatives, and to encourage responsible use of growing media once it is sold. The advisory points can make a big difference not only to the environment, but also to customer success with the products they purchase and gardening in general.



1. Support the Responsible Sourcing Scheme for Growing Media (RSSGM)

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme for Growing Media (responsiblesourcing.org.uk) is an industry-wide scheme to score growing media products according to their environmental and social impacts. Increasingly scores will appear on pack, helping shoppers to make an informed judgement on the product they are purchasing in much the same way as energy ratings are designed to do for electrical goods. A supplier's membership of the scheme shows commitment to doing the right things by the environment.

We encourage retailers to:

- Encourage growing media manufacturers as strongly as possible to join the scheme and display their products' scores on their packaging
- Train your staff on the RSSGM using the free e-learning available from the Garden Centre Association and Horticultural Trades Association



2. Stock items that encourage responsible and successful gardening

Stocking items that are as effective, sustainable and responsibly sourced as possible will make a huge difference to the environment and to gardeners' success. Many shoppers will be novice gardeners and will not have a detailed knowledge of what products should be used for what purpose for best results in the garden and the best environmental outcomes. Some particularly concerning behaviours are: the use of peat-based multi-purpose composts as soil improvers; the use of multi-purpose product where a specialist product would be better; or the use of peat-based products where a peat-free alternative would be just as good.

We encourage retailers to:

- Develop a ranging policy that supports manufacturers that commit to the RSSGM and whose products deliver the best scores
- Ensure you have enough stock of peat-free product in all types of growing media to enable shoppers to go peat-free
- Ensure you stock products for particular purposes in the garden such as specialist mixes, mulches or soil improvers

3. Provide information for shoppers that drives purchases of the most sustainable and effective products

There are around 30 million gardeners in the UK with differing levels of knowledge. We need to give them the right information about the right products for the right tasks in the garden. When we do this they get better results, and we reduce wasteful use of peat and scarce peat-alternatives and the harm this does to our environment. For example, millions of gardeners according to HTA and RHS research use multipurpose compost as a soil improver. This is an unnecessary use of peat, and also wastes scarce materials such as wood fibres and coir which are needed to replace peat in horticulture. It's also going to give worse results than a soil improver designed specifically for this purpose.

We encourage retailers to:

- Plan out displays of growing media so that soil improvers are the first option a shopper will see
- Provide point of sale information making clear that soil improvers are for soil improvement and that growing media or composts are best used for container growing
- Position peat-free products so that they are prominent and the first option that the shopper sees
- Familiarise themselves on which link-sale items will help gardeners get the best results from peat-free products. These include fertilisers designed specifically for success with peat-free growing media. Supplier and manufacturer information for retailers is a good source of this information
- Display point of sale information on the RSSGM in their stores, in particular around displays of growing media
- Have displays of plants that have been potted on in peat-free growing media so that shoppers can see results for themselves and become familiar with the look of peat free product
- Help customers who want to home-compost by providing information on the environmental benefits of this, as well as the equipment and materials needed to get best results





5. Use pricing to drive responsible use and purchasing of growing media

This guide does not prescribe or recommend any particular pricing policy or price point. We also remind retailers of their obligations with respect to competition law regarding pricing decisions, and in particular of not discussing or acting collectively with other businesses on pricing matters. Further guidance on this is available from the Competition and Markets Authority web site. In terms of broad principles however, there are questions and considerations retailers can take into account in their approach to pricing growing media that are likely to drive more sustainable use and purchasing of growing media.

We encourage retailers to:

- Avoid promotional offers such as discounting or multi-buys that could drive over-consumption or waste of products as well as material, especially where such an approach would increase purchasing of less sustainable products over more environmentally friendly ones
- Avoid charging price premiums on growing media solely on the basis of a product's superior environmental credentials where the product is in all other respects similar to a lower priced product, for instance in its performance, purpose, size or cost
- Consider your approach to pricing products with superior environmental credentials as part of your overall approach to sustainability in your business. You can strengthen your reputation as a business that takes sustainability seriously by making sure the way you price environmentally friendly goods is consistent with what you say about your approach to sustainability in your advertising.

4. Ensure your shop-floor staff are trained to support shoppers

Staff in retailers such as garden centres, DIY stores and nurseries are a trusted source of information for gardeners. When staff talk to shoppers about growing media or tasks in the garden it's important that the shopper gets the best possible advice. There is a range of free training and information available to support you with this. Shoppers may increasingly have questions or even challenges about the use of peat in horticulture, and it's important that we can provide shoppers with the information they need.

We encourage retailers to:

- Organise for their staff to take the free GCA and HTA e-learning to support good conversations with shoppers on growing media
- Make staff aware of the information on growing media and soil improvers that's available from growing media suppliers and manufacturers and incorporate this into staff training sessions





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