



Why use peat-free compost?

Here at the National Botanic Garden of Wales we do not use compost containing peat. And our plants still look great, don't they?

So why don't we use peat?

For ethical reasons – we want to help to conserve, not destroy, peat bogs. 80% of British peatlands are in a poor condition due to peat extraction, drainage for agriculture, poor management and forestry planting.

Peat bogs are fascinating places which provide a home for specialist wildlife and plants that depend on this increasingly rare habitat for their survival. These bogs take thousands of years to form but can be destroyed by peat cutting and draining in just a few years. This is not just a disaster for its biodiversity but also for our climate – peat bogs contain a huge store of carbon which is released back into the atmosphere when we drain our bogs. Bad news for global warming. Bad news too for flooding – peat bogs gradually release stored rainwater.

Losing our bogs can also lead to a loss of our history too – peat can contain remarkably well preserved plant, animal and even human remains dating back thousands of years. These provide a unique, living peat archive that records climate, vegetation and landscape change.



Peat bogs are important habitats for curlews (above) and insect-eating sundew (below).



If you'd like to avoid using peat-based compost here are a few handy tips:

Read the compost label carefully. If it doesn't say peat-free then it probably isn't – beware of 'environmentally friendly' and 'organic' branded composts that actually contain peat.

- Labels should also let you know how much you'll need to water or feed your plants. If labelling is poor, beware of the product.
- Peat-free composts can be coarser so you may need to add horticultural sand or fine coir – again, read the label carefully.
- Price tends to reflect quality – be wary of really cheap peat-free compost.
- Like we do at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, you can make your own compost from your own garden waste – much cheaper, more sustainable and you'll have to make less trips to the tip. Bear in mind though - it's not easy to make your own compost useable for seed sowing.

What is peat-free compost made from?

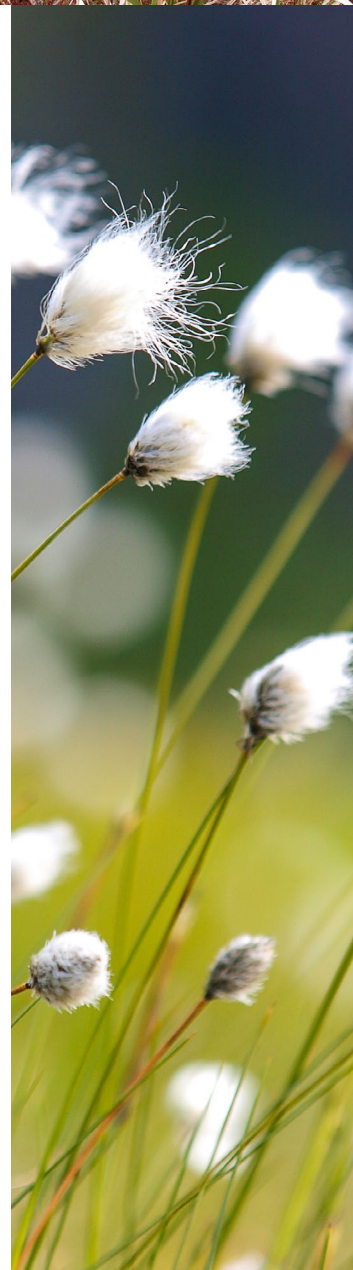
Most peat-free composts use wood-based materials as their primary ingredient - woodfibre, composted bark, sawdust, wood or paper waste. Many add coconut fibre or 'coir' - this holds water well but not nutrients. Local authorities turn green waste collected from homes and businesses into a green compost that, due to its high pH and nutrient content, tends to be an excellent soil improver or mulch.

Here in the Garden we use peat-free compost for propagation and we have specific mixes made up for some of our specialist plants. You can buy the same peat-free compost that we use, in our **Y Pot Blodyn** plant shop.

If you live or work in Carmarthenshire, Cwm Environmental turns your organic waste into Merlin's Magic peat-free compost. You can buy this from the county's household waste and recycling centres.

This leaflet has been produced for Carmarthenshire Bogs, a Heritage Lottery Funded project led by Carmarthenshire County Council.

For more information, go to www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/biodiversity



PHOTOS: BRUCE LANGRIDGE; ISABEL MACHO; SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Clockwise from top left:
Mynydd Figyn peat bog, Carmarthenshire; sphagnum moss; cottongrass grows on peat bogs.