

Gardening & plastics

Garden centres rely on plastics, for pots, labels, trays, polystyrene and shrink wrap. Although pots, trays and shrink wrap can be recycled commercially, once plants have left the garden centre, recycling is not generally available for the plastics involved. Recycled polystyrene trays (usually grey rather than white) can be produced, they are not as strong as standard ones so are not widely used, so effectively polystyrene is not recyclable. So to reduce the amount of plastic waste created by your gardening, try taking the following steps:

- Avoid buying plants grown in polystyrene packs
- Grow plants from seed yourself, rather than buying plants grown commercially, or source from other gardeners (eg Burgh Beautiful Plant Sale)
- Re-use your own pots (cleaning them first to avoid potential spread of pests & diseases) – they can last for years if treated carefully
- Take surplus plastic pots to New Hopetoun Gardens (there is a drop-off point as you enter the shop)
- Look for packaging that contains a recycled content, for both smaller items like pots and larger ones like compost bins
- For seedlings, make your own paper pots, or use toilet roll tubes (no need to remove pots when planting – the roots grow through them as they biodegrade)
- If you need to buy new pots, look out for biodegradable ones (or ask friends, or on Freecycle, to see who has surplus ones)
- Make your own garden compost and leaf mould, rather than buying compost, to avoid the plastic sack (only clean plastic bags can be put in the blue bin)
- Although not practical for everyone, if you need a large quantity of compost you could have a ton bag delivered, rather than many plastic sacks (ton bags are not recyclable, but you may find a taker on Freecycle)
- Use natural fibre string, rather than plastic twine or plastic coated wire (natural fibre string can go on the compost heap afterwards)
- Make your own plant labels from cut up yogurt pots, or similar stiff plastic – they can be cleaned and put in the blue bin after use
- If you are growing your own fruit & veg, it needs no plastic packaging to get it from the garden straight to your kitchen!

Other environmental impacts of gardening include:

- **Use of peat** – although good quality peat-free composts are available, most garden centre plants are grown in peat-based compost, and most bagged compost contains peat. Look out for peat-free nurseries, and buy peat-free compost, or make your own garden compost.
- **Transport impacts** (many garden centre plants are imported) – seek out UK grown ones, or grow your own
- **Pesticides** used on plants can remain within the plant, going on to poison pollinators such as bees (including plants labelled ‘Perfect for Pollinators’) – buy plants from sources that don’t use pesticides eg organic nurseries.
- **Support wildlife** (under increased pressure due to climate change) by growing different flowering plants throughout the year, creating wildlife habitats (including compost bins and ponds), and feeding birds
- **Prevent the spread of invasive pests and diseases**, both when buying and swapping plants. It is likely that a new bacterial disease (*Xylella Fastidiosa*) will reach the UK, and may affect many types of woody plants and trees. Buying UK grown plants would avoid this issue. New Zealand Flatworm (which eats earthworms but doesn’t improve soil quality as earth worms do) is widespread – if you find it in your garden, destroy and dispose of it safely.
- **Composting** is a great way of recycling both fruit & veg peelings and garden waste, creates a fantastic wildlife habitat in your compost bin, and can provide free compost for your garden
- **Absorb water** – climate change means we will have more extreme weather events, including heavy rainfall, which could lead to flooding. Having plants, and gravel or other surfaces that absorb water (rather than tarmac and slabs that don’t) helps to prevent flooding.
- **Surplus or damaged hand tools** can be dropped off either at the Linlithgow Recycling Centre or New Hopetoun Gardens, then refurbished by the Prison Service and donated to community groups
- **Growing your own** fruit & veg, or buying from local growers, is a great way to reduce food miles, as well as plastic packaging.