

Peat in compost

You may not be aware of how important peat bogs are to climate change. Peat bogs represent the second largest carbon sinks after the oceans on our planet. They hold massive amounts of carbon which is locked into the material we know as peat. Peat bogs are more important even than forests at storing carbon. At this time of year lots of people are preparing their gardens for a summer of planting and harvesting. Compost is often dug into their soils. Although it is highly commendable to be cultivating a garden, the problem with compost is that many of the brands bought in garden centres are largely composed of peat. Adding peat based compost to your garden could be thought of as enriching your soil and retaining all of that carbon in the soil. Sadly that's not how it works. Remove peat from its waterlogged, deoxygenated and acidic environment and digging it into soil allows it to come into contact with air. Its carbon combines with the oxygen which then results in the release of carbon from the peat in the form of carbon dioxide. This process is essentially the decomposition of the peat by bacteria. The CO₂ passes into the atmosphere. There goes the store of carbon. Up goes the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere thereby contributing to climate change.

It is possible to buy peat free compost which is just as good for your gardens. Be aware that you have to search diligently in garden centres to find peat free compost. In a survey of many of the retailers of composts in this area the following findings were made:

<u>Source</u>	<u>Number of compost brands on sale.</u>	<u>Number of peat-free brands</u>
B & Q Buxton	16	2
B & Q Stockport	16	2
Brookside GC, Poynton	12	2
Dobbies GC, Marple	14	5
Notcutts GC, Woodford	18	7
Hollins hardware, Marple	9	1
Asda, Marple	2	0

The composts which contain peat are generally less expensive than peat free brands. However what is the cost to climate change? Peat bogs are being decimated in countries such as Indonesia and Ireland. In Indonesia the removal of peat is primarily aimed at freeing more land for agriculture. In Ireland however most of the extraction is for the compost industry. So buying peat free compost is another way in which you can help to reduce the addition of carbon dioxide to our atmosphere and so help to reduce the effects of climate change.