

Plastic Free and Sustainable Gardening Tips

Plastic Reduction

- The first thing is to stop buying new plastic. Whenever you consider purchasing something plastic for the garden, try to find an alternative.
- Use wooden or bamboo plant labels instead of plastic (available on Ebay and Amazon).
- Use galvanised rather than plastic-covered wire, and avoid plastic-coated Soft Tie - use jute or raffia instead.
- Buy sustainable sourced wooden tools; avoid plastic-coated tools.
- A village plastic pots recycling scheme (Marion Jay).
- Re-use plastic compost bags. Torn compost bags may be recycled with plastic carrier bags, provided they are cleaned first.
- Make your own compost, reducing fuel emissions and plastic packaging.
- Raise as many plants as possible from seed. Reuse seed trays and old plastic pots.
- Steep well-rotted horse manure or comfrey leaves to make liquid plant food, to avoid buying feed in plastic bottles.

Gardening for Wildlife

- Allow areas to grow wild in your garden - long grass, log piles, shelter, shallow water dishes - to attract hedgehogs and birds, which prey on slugs and snails.
- Tolerate wasps; they are voracious hunters of plant pests and valuable pollinators.
- Use garlic and chilli spray to deter rabbits, aphids and other pests. Recipe: Add 2 - 3 crushed fresh garlic cloves to 2 tbsps sunflower oil, and leave to infuse for 24 hours. The following day, add 1 tsp of fresh lemon juice to the mixture, along with 500 ml water. Strain the mixture through a fine mesh strainer to remove the pieces of garlic. Transfer to a spray bottle and apply the repellent whenever necessary, to deter a range of pests.
- Blast off lesser infestations of aphids with a strong hose spray.
- Create a pond. Frogs and toads eat slugs, and a pond also provides a watering hole for bats, hedgehogs and birds.
- Bird feeders and nest boxes attract birds which will also prey on aphids and caterpillars.
- Weeds: the least toxic herbicides are horticultural vinegar (acetic acid), certain soaps and clove oil products. These are all most effective when sprayed on annual weeds on hot, sunny days. Some perennial weeds can be controlled this way when young, or with repeated applications. Boiling water works where weeds are isolated from wanted plants, eg. between paving stones. Hot weed guns are effective, but avoid propane and use electric instead. Hand weeding is most effective when done before weeds get big enough to feed their roots.
- Place cardboard around the base of strawberry plants once they start flowering, to keep the fruit clean and retain moisture in the ground. Check for slugs first. Cardboard is an excellent weed suppressant generally and can be used around shrubs, with a bark mulch on top.
- Hoe rashes of freshly-germinated weeds on warm, dry days - young weed roots which are cut and exposed to hot sunshine won't grow back.

Retail

- Exmoor Pony Poo compost, although packaged in plastic bags, is rich and crumbly, peat-free and locally sourced. Two Gardening Club members have reported nettle seedlings germinating in pots planted up using Pony Poo compost. Nevertheless, I believe this compost contains more nutrient than Melcourt Sylvagrow Peat Free, as plants seem to love it: <https://www.wildponywhispering.co.uk/ExmoorCompost>
- Rocket Gardens, in Cornwall, grow a range of organic vegetable plug plants, herbs, potted fruits and companion plants. They send plants packed in cardboard, newspaper and straw. www.rocketgardens.co.uk
- Bluebell Cottage Nursery has a gorgeous range of perennials, shrubs and trees, and offers an option for plastic free packaging when you check out: <https://www.bluebellcottage.co.uk>
- Fibrex Nurseries are specialist growers of pelargoniums and ivies, begonias and other choice plants. They grow some plants in biodegradable pots, and plastic pots are reused. Young pelargoniums for mail order are raised in biodegradable pots; plastic pots on other plants are removed before packing, and reused. <https://www.fibrex.co.uk>
- Paddock Plants: perennials, grasses, ferns and shrubs, grown peat-free. All online orders sent 99% plastic-free (all bar the labels), and plants sold in biodegradable Vipots or decanted into cardboard POSI pots at point of sale <http://www.paddockplants.co.uk>
- Cotswold Garden Flowers grow choice perennials. Nursery owned by plantsman extraordinaire Bob Brown. Plants wrapped in newspaper for mailing. <http://www.cgf.net/>
- Gee Tee Bulbs supply spring, summer and autumn-flowering bulbs, and reuse plastic where possible, sending plastic trays back to their supplier. <http://www.gee-tee.co.uk>
- Victoriana Nursery offers a range of vegetables and fruit, including lots of heritage and unusual varieties. They remove plugs from plastic before sending, use recycled pots, and pack in straw or shredded paper. <http://www.victoriananursery.co.uk>
- Incredible Vegetables, based on Dartmoor, grow perennial vegetables and other edibles. Growing perennial vegetables reduces soil disturbance and, as they are established plants, require less watering in the summer. Plants are removed from plastic pots before sending, and packaged in recycled materials. <http://www.incrediblevegetables.co.uk>
- Bokashi is a fermentation process which takes place inside an airtight container such as a Bokashi waste bin. Cooked and uncooked food waste, chopped into small chunks, is placed inside the waste bin. To initiate the anaerobic fermentation process, Bokashi bran containing wheat bran and microorganisms is sprinkled onto the food waste. Fermentation takes two weeks, and once the Bokashi waste is ready it can be spread in the garden as a nutrient rich fertiliser: <https://homeandgarden.agriton.co.uk>
- Weaver Green for durable and stylish homewares manufactured from recycled plastic, including rugs, cushions and throws: <https://www.weavergreen.com/>