

Ideas for Plastic-free Gardening

(Updates from meeting on 03-03-20 in blue.)

British gardeners get through approx. 500 million new plastic pots every year* - about two thirds of these are never recycled and therefore end up in landfill.

Plastics in our gardening can also include string, labels, hoses, watering cans, netting, compost bags, and bottles (e.g. seaweed tonic.)

Recyclable alternatives: newspaper, wood, glass, metal.

- **Raising plants from seed, without using plastic...** “Seed sowing is when gardens hit peak plastic use.” Alternatives include:
 - Swapping plastic seed trays for wooden or bamboo ones
 - Wooden seed trays (warmer, more porous) – purchase second-hand online or make from scrap wood
 - Bamboo seed trays (pricier)
 - Try making your own pots from newspaper or loo/kitchen roll inners
 - Biodegradable seed modules – newspaper, cardboard (loo rolls for sweet peas and larger seeds). These can be made/stored in the winter months, ready for planting in the spring. And can be planted straight in to the ground, for roots to grow through. [Tear the tops of loo and kitchen rolls before planting out, to aid growth?](#)
 - Experiment with soil blocks (compressed compost cubes) instead of pots
 - Replace plastic labels with wooden and bamboo alternatives

- **Buying new plants, whilst avoiding plastics...**
 - Buy from nurseries that supply plants in biodegradable pots or packaging – and ask (challenge) your garden centre to do so
 - Order bare-root trees, shrubs, perennials for planting in Autumn and Spring – ideally from suppliers who supply the bare-roots in recyclable packaging. An example: David Austin roses have just removed plastic from their bare-root packaging.
 - Grow from seed! It takes time, and experimentation, but you get more plants than you can afford to buy – and you can share/swap your excess seedlings with friends and neighbours. If you are an RHS member, join the RHS seed scheme.
 - Ask friends/neighbours for cuttings or divisions – perhaps in return for seedlings, produce etc. Then, the plants you grow from the cuttings and divisions can remind you of the friends/family whose plants you shared!

- **Alternatives to plastic pots...**
 - Clay, but these are heavy and new clay pots a use high amount of energy to produce. Buy second-hand, and use broken clay pots as crocks to aid drainage in pots
 - Bamboo, Yarnton nurseries (Oxford shopping Village) now stock these – [much cheaper \(better for value\) online](#)
 - Vipots ([greentechpots.com](#)) made from rice hulls, last 3-5 years – but made in (shipped from) China, therefore high carbon footprint?

- Make your own homemade, biodegradable pots, from newspaper and cardboard. See Youtube for videos on how, e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ou-3ZBI_ac
- Recycling old black plastic pots...
 - Do any of our local nurseries/garden centres offer a black pot recycling scheme? Yes! Burford Garden Company and [Bunkers Hill Nursery](#).
- **Compost bags. What to do with them – and how to avoid them altogether!**
 - Ideally, we all make our own compost – a bigger time investment ([Session on compost making?](#))
 - Compost ‘bags for life’ which you take back to garden centres for re-filling with branded composts. Any in Oxfordshire? Yes! [Bunkers Hill Nursery](#).
 - If buying compost (bark etc.) in a plastic bag is unavoidable, for example if you require an ericaceous mulch when home-produce compost is more alkaline, then the bags can be re-used for carrying green-waste to the tip, to line clay pots, and can even double-up as potato grow bags. They can also, in some areas be recycled – but they need to be clean (which uses water to do so...)
- **String, netting...**
 - Replace nylon string with jute twine
 - Netting, with biodegradable pea netting, made of knotted jute
 - Fruit-cage netting though...
- **Watering...**
 - Harvest rain water
 - Mulch to retain moisture
 - Metal watering cans instead of plastic
 - But what about watering butts, hoses, dripper systems? Re-use for as long as possible, then replace, if possible, with an alternative material.
 - Alter what we grow to suit the changing climate? Drought tolerant plants?

What to do with our leftover garden plastics?

Re-use – until end of life. Then, recycle, where possible.

Ultimately, same as regular shopping – doing our research and being prepared:

Avoid impulse buys, plan, research sourcing plastic free products – many suppliers are now switching, such as David Austin roses have recently announced a move from plastic packaging to paper/cardboard packaging

Prioritise avoiding single use plastics, such as plastic pots and single-use packaging

Ask your preferred garden centre/nursery to stock products not packed in plastic

Additional resources/reading:

www.rhs.org.uk/plasticfree - further tips with links to suppliers or alternatives

Book: Plastic-free Gardening by Fiona Thackeray

*Sally Nex, The Garden, RHS members’ magazine, March 2019