



I DON'T  
DIG  
PEAT



garden  
organic

## Going peat-free: what you can use

**There are all sorts of things that you can use for soil improving and making seed and potting composts without the need for peat. Ideally, these alternatives should be from sustainable, renewable sources, and as local as possible. There is no point in simply replacing one ecological disaster with another!**

Items listed here may be used for soil improving, as ingredients in seed and potting composts, or both.

See our compost recipes download for more advice on making your own mix.

### Loam

Good quality garden soil, traditionally made by leaving heaps of grass turf to decay. Loam supplies some plant nutrients, retains nutrients and moisture, and drains well.

#### Uses

Use loam in seed and potting compost mixtures. Adds weight to the mix, which is useful for tall plants in pots. Not suitable for use on its own. Loam can contain weed seeds.

#### Sources

Homemade? Yes

Available to buy? Yes

### Leaf mould

Leaf mould is made up of decomposed autumn leaves. It holds moisture and gives good structure to mixes. Rich in micro-organisms, leaf mould is helpful in suppressing plant diseases; however, it can contain weed seeds and slug eggs, so be aware. It is very much a sustainable, renewable and local product.

#### Uses

Can be worked into the ground to improve soil as a soil conditioner and used in seed and potting compost mixtures. It can be used alone for seed sowing, but as it can contain weed seeds, it is not really suitable for sowing tiny seeds.

#### Sources

Homemade? Yes

Available to buy? No

### Comfrey leaf mould

A mixture of leaf mould and rotted comfrey leaves. Comfrey grows in many people's gardens or can be bought as plants or seeds. Comfrey adds nitrogen and potassium to the leaf mould, making it a much richer product.

### Uses

Can be added as an ingredient to potting compost mixtures. It can be used on its own or diluted with added sharp sand.

#### Sources

Homemade? Yes. Fill a bucket or old compost sack with alternate layers of two-year-old leaf mould and chopped and wilted comfrey leaves (preferably Bocking 14). Firm down gently and water if the leaf mould is dry. Ready to use in a few months, when the comfrey leaves have virtually disappeared. Available to buy? No

### Composted bark

A by-product of the timber industry, pine bark is said to be the best, as it has low nutrients and low water retention.

#### Uses

Composted bark can be used as a soil mulch and conditioner. It can also be used in seed and potting compost mixtures. It provides bulk and structure, but try to use a fine grade.

#### Sources

Homemade? No

Available to buy? Yes

### Horticultural sand

A non-recycled product from quarries.

#### Uses

Horticultural sand can be used in seed and potting compost mixtures. It encourages drainage, so mixtures don't become waterlogged and airless. Sand also adds weight, which is useful for tall, top heavy plants in pots.

#### Sources

Homemade? No

Available to buy? Yes, but don't use soft, builder's or play sand. This may change the pH and not drain too well.



### Perlite and vermiculite

Imported, natural mined materials that become puffed up and lightweight when heated. They are sterile and neutral.

#### Uses

Perlite and vermiculite can be used in seed and potting compost mixtures, and compost for cuttings. They improve drainage, increase air space and hold on to water. Vermiculite also contains calcium and magnesium.

#### Sources

Homemade? No

Available to buy? Yes

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### Coir

Coir fibre dust is a waste or by-product from the production of coir fibre from the coconut husk. This itself is a by-product of coconut production for human consumption. Imported by sea in a compressed state on large cargo ships, coir has a relatively low carbon footprint.

#### Uses

Coir can be added to seed and potting mixtures or on its own, particularly for plant cuttings. Coir pots are available as an alternative to traditional peat pots.

#### Sources

Homemade? No

Available to buy? Yes. Available neat for use as an ingredient in homemade seed and potting composts, as well as ready-made seed and potting compost.

### Homemade garden compost

The most sustainable peat-alternative product, homemade compost is decomposed garden and kitchen waste, processed through a compost heap. It provides bulk, structure, a range of plant foods, water-retaining qualities, and air. It also hosts a diverse range of useful micro-organisms. Follow this link for details of how to make your own

garden compost: [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/composting](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/composting)

#### Uses

Use homemade garden compost as a soil improver and plant food. Mix it with other ingredients as part of a potting mix. It is too rich to be used on its own.

#### Sources

Homemade? Yes

Purchase? No

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### Worm compost

This ingredient is made up of organic waste – usually kitchen and food waste – processed by worms in a worm composting system. Worm compost is rich in nutrients and micro-organisms.

#### Uses

Can be used as both a soil improver and plant food. It can also be added to potting mixes. It has a very good capacity to hold water, and the worm activity makes worm compost richer than garden compost.

#### Sources

Homemade? Yes

Available to buy? Yes. Often sold as 'worm casts'.