

Responsible sourcing of growing media in the UK[©]

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In 2011 the UK government passed an Environment White Paper which included ambitious targets for peat reduction. The targets aimed for no peat in retail growing media by 2020 and none used by professional growers by 2030. The voluntary targets have helped to change the perceptions and actions of the entire industry. Peat use is gradually falling and most importantly, there is now an acceptance that other materials can enhance the performance of plant growth either in conjunction with or as a complete replacement for peat.

A task force was formed in response to the White Paper that included all stakeholders in the industry—manufacturers, growers, retailers, NGOs, and Defra (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and after 5 years of extensive deliberations the Responsible Sourcing Scheme was created. The scheme enables manufacturers and users of growing media to understand and measure how their choice of growing media materials impacts on seven criteria; energy use, water use, social compliance, habitat and biodiversity, pollution, renewability, and resource use efficiency. Sourcing materials responsibly is about making deliberate, educated choices to minimise those impacts but the scheme incorporates a need to constantly revisit and challenge thresholds in order to maintain best practice. The criteria have been defined as being able to differentiate more responsibly sourced from less responsibly sourced materials and it is hoped that it will enable users of the scheme to improve the sustainability of this part of their businesses. The intention has been to make the scheme globally relevant with reference to documents and standards applicable to all countries. Another strength of the scheme is that all growing media materials will be judged and scrutinized equally.

Users of the scheme—normally manufacturers, will be independently audited and will need to provide evidence to support the core that they are claiming. It is hoped that the scheme will be ready for use during 2017. Further information can be found at: <https://hta.org.uk/committeesgroups.html>

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