

Dear Headteacher,

I am writing to enquire whether at your school you do any planting projects? Planting any bulbs, flowers or vegetables? As Spring is approaching, if you do, then this is certainly the planting season.

As such we wondered what you and your school might know about peat...?

Peat as I'm sure you know can be used as a growing medium and is often included in bags of compost sold to gardeners. However, peat on its own is not fertile; it only becomes fertile when nutrients and fertilisers are added to it. These can equally be added to peat-free alternatives.

Did you also know that peat is essential for locking away carbon and keeping it out of our atmosphere?

Over the last 10,000 years, UK peatlands have sequestered 5.5 billion tonnes of carbon – nearly 40 times the amount of carbon stored in our woodlands. Peatlands contain about half of the UK's stored carbon. Globally, peatlands store about half a trillion tonnes of carbon, trapping organic matter underwater. Unfortunately, digging up the peat enables oxygen to get to it, so the organic matter starts to decay, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The environmental damage caused by extracting peat for compost is immense. It releases huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change. Peat bogs are also excellent areas of biodiversity, so peat extraction contributes to habitat and species loss.

In 2011 the government published a White Paper with voluntary targets for the end of peat use in horticulture. The aim of this was for all compost available to amateur gardeners to be peat-free by 2020. Unfortunately, this paper only had voluntary targets and we have noticed that lots of garden centres are still selling bags of compost containing peat.

We would therefore ask you, as a school, if you could consider carefully your use of compost. We are hoping to compile a list of schools/organisations who use peat free compost and would love to add your schools name to our list, so please feel free to respond and let us know if you are already a peat free school or are intending to become one.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Leicester Friends of the Earth

Data sourced from:

*Nature's Home* – RSPB's Winter/Spring 2020 magazine

*The Garden Jungle or Gardening to Save the Planet* by Dave Goulson