



Custom Compost - September 2023

Peat Pros and Cons

There is some discussion in the media and trade sources about the NZ horticultural industry and its use of peat as an ingredient in potting mix.

This discussion is a cut-and-paste job on what is an international focus in countries with varying circumstances and histories regarding the peat supply or the lack of it.

To be clear, we are incredibly lucky in NZ. We have many great options to manufacture quality mixes for the specific growing conditions that are unique to NZ's many and varied microclimates.

We have bark, quality composted pine bark, and many parts of the world are not so lucky. We have Pumice. Again, most parts of the growing world have little or no access to this relatively cheap (in NZ) product.

We have peat. Our mining of peat is strictly controlled in terms of access, volume extracted, and environmental mandates that require significant investment to ensure the mined areas are returned to their wetland state in a condition better than what pre-existed the mine concession.

We also have access to internationally available resources such as Coco fibre, wood fibre, imported peat, perlite and vermiculite.



Always two sides



Peat extraction in NZ is tightly controlled

The pro

The big and significant advantages of having some peat present in some percentage in your potting mix is its remarkable ability to efficiently manage water by increasing capillary forces and, most importantly, hold onto nutrients that would otherwise leach out of the mix and end up in our waterways and ultimately the sea - a big environmental plus.



Peat makes for happy plants

There are also no pathogens, bacteria, bugs, or other nasties to worry about.

Bark mixes and wood fibre which are used extensively in areas of the world where bark is not readily available, do not hold nutrients and only hold water if the particle size is such that water is physically slowed in the drainage process (you run the risk of blocking drainage holes in pots).

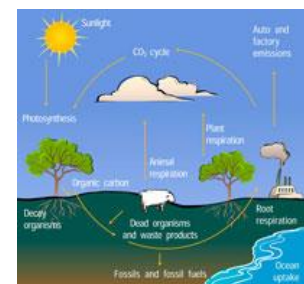
Coir fibre has some of the same positive qualities as peat but has other less desirable qualities, i.e. high EC. High salt levels are a byproduct of where coconut palms and the nuts are harvested from a manageable but undesirable trait.

However, as we have recently experienced, under recent COVID effected trading patterns, disruptions in transport logistics can and do create havoc with the supply and price of products. Coir has shown itself to be vulnerable to both these supply factors.

We are indeed fortunate in NZ that we can blend a smallish percentage of peat or coir with bark and pumice to produce blends that capture and enhances the best qualities of all the ingredients; with a positive outcome; plants love the difference a good mix can make.

The Cons

There is only one. When looking at soilless potting mixes, Peat is considered a nonrenewable resource, yet when used to create new plants which can go on to become carbon sinks and are, by nature, solar-powered oxygen pumps, the argument for measured and regulated use of peat as a potting mix addition is a compelling and positive argument.



No Laughing Matter

The ongoing decline in productivity achieved in NZ was highlighted in a way that caught my attention recently, in the format of an old joke. Ready? An Irishman, a Brit, an American, an Aussie and a Kiwi agree to walk into a pub after work once each has produced the same output value.

At 5pm, the Irishman walks in, job done. He waits alone until the American joined him at 10.40pm. It's 40 minutes after midnight when the Brit arrives, followed by the Aussie at 1.10am.

At 3.40am, the Kiwi enters the pub but can't stay long as the working day starts again at 8am. Sad, but a true depiction of what our poor per capita productivity rate looks like.

According to OECD figures, New Zealanders have to work 10.7 hours longer to produce the same amount as their world-leading Irish counterparts.

And it's not due to lack of effort. It is partially about our ongoing failure to adopt the technological tools to keep up, plus an overreliance on the No 8 wire and "she'll be right mentality if you will.

Here is a quote from a rare economist of interest, "Productivity isn't everything, but in the long run, it's almost everything (American Paul Krugman).

Well, isn't that food for thought? But wait, there's more ...

A crow ...

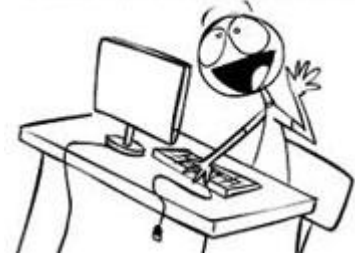
... was sitting on a tree doing nothing all day. A small rabbit saw the crow and asked him, "Can I also sit like you and do nothing all day long? The crow answered, "Sure, why not? So the rabbit sat below the crow and did nothing. Suddenly a fox jumped on the rabbit and ate it.

Moral of the story. To be sitting doing nothing, you must be sitting very high up!!!!

Kind regards

The Custom Mix Team

TODAY HAS BEEN UNPRODUCTIVE



**TODAY, I'm
doing NOTHING!
Cuz I started doing
it yesterday, but I
haven't finish it yet!**

