

# Top 7 Eco-Friendly Peat Moss Alternatives



Peat moss has a long history of gardening benefits. However, it also poses significant problems for the environment when you use peat moss. Therefore you might want to explore peat moss alternatives. There are plenty of great options that do the job without damaging the earth.

## What Is Peat Moss?

Peat moss is a type of organic material that comes from the decomposition of plants in peat bogs over thousands of years. A peat bog, also known as a peatland, is a type of wetland ecosystem formed over thousands of years through the accumulation of dead vegetation.

# Reasons People Use Peat Moss in Gardening

Peat moss is used in gardens for various reasons:

## Soil Amendment

Peat moss is an excellent soil amendment that improves soil structure and texture. It helps to loosen dense soils, improving drainage in clay soils and retaining moisture in sandy soils. The fibrous nature of peat moss also enhances aeration, which is vital for root growth.

## Water Retention

Peat moss has a high water-holding capacity, enabling it to retain moisture in the soil. This characteristic is especially useful during dry periods, as it helps to keep the soil consistently moist, providing a more stable environment for plants.

## pH Adjustment

Peat moss is acidic, and its presence in the soil can lower the pH level, making it more acidic. This is beneficial for acid-loving plants, such as blueberries, rhododendrons, and azaleas, which thrive in slightly acidic conditions.

## Organic Matter

As an organic material, peat moss contributes to soil fertility by slowly releasing nutrients as it breaks down. It also serves as a substrate for beneficial soil microorganisms, improving the overall health of the soil ecosystem.

## Seed Starting and Potting Mixes

Peat moss is commonly used in seed-starting mixes and potting mixes for container gardening. Its light and fluffy texture provides an ideal medium for young seedlings to establish their root systems.

## **Soil Conditioner**

When applied as a top dressing or worked into the soil, peat moss acts as a soil conditioner, improving the overall quality of the soil and enhancing plant growth.

## **Environmental Problems with Peat Moss**

Unfortunately, using peat moss creates problems for the earth. Peat bogs are unique ecosystems that store a significant amount of carbon and provide a habitat for various plants and wildlife. Unsustainable harvesting of peat moss can lead to the depletion of these valuable habitats and release stored carbon into the atmosphere. Additional problems related to using peat moss include impact on water quality and quantity, increased flooding in over-harvested areas, and the loss of species diversity.

## **Top 7 Eco-Friendly Peat Moss Alternatives**

Several peat moss alternatives are available for gardeners who want to reduce their environmental impact. Gardeners can create healthier soils, support sustainable practices, and reduce the impact on sensitive peatland ecosystems. Some of the best peat moss alternatives include:

### **Coconut Coir**

[Coconut coir](#) is a renewable resource derived from coconut husks, which are usually discarded as waste. Using coconut coir as a peat moss alternative helps recycle this agricultural byproduct and reduces the need for landfill disposal. It has similar water-holding capacity and aeration properties but is more sustainable and environmentally friendly. And yet, it is a more sustainable option compared to peat moss.

Do note that the production and transportation of coconut coir might have some environmental impact. This includes energy consumption and carbon emissions associated with processing and transportation. However, these impacts are generally lower compared to peat moss extraction.

## **Compost**

Compost is made from organic waste, such as kitchen scraps and yard trimmings, which would otherwise end up in landfills. By composting organic materials, gardeners divert waste from landfills. This reduces methane emissions. Moreover, it creates a nutrient-rich soil amendment that improves soil health. There are very few potential drawbacks to using compost as a peat moss alternative, which is why it's a common peat moss alternative.

## **Leaf Mold**

Leaf mold is the result of decomposed leaves and is a valuable organic material for improving soil structure and water retention. It is an excellent source of nutrients for plants and can be made by composting leaves over time. Note that leaf mold may take a longer time to break down compared to compost, though. Therefore, gardeners may need to plan and start the decomposition process in advance.

## **Well-Rotted Manure**

Well-rotted manure is a byproduct of animal husbandry and agriculture. Using well-rotted manure as a soil amendment can help recycle organic waste. Aged and well-rotted animal manure can enrich the soil with nutrients and improve its fertility. It also enhances soil structure and microbial activity.

Note that manure from intensively farmed livestock may contain residual antibiotics or other substances that could impact soil and water quality if not properly managed. Ensuring that the manure comes from a reputable and sustainable source is

essential if you want to use it as a peat moss alternative.

## **Pine Bark**

Pine bark, when aged and ground, can be used as a soil amendment to improve aeration and drainage in the soil. It is particularly useful for plants that prefer acidic conditions. Since it is a byproduct of the timber industry, you're making use of something that would otherwise go to the landfill. Note that some pine bark products may contain chemicals or preservatives used during timber processing. That's just something you want to check for before adding it to your garden.

## **Rice Hulls**

[Rice hulls](#) are lightweight and provide good aeration to the soil. They can be used as mulch or mixed into the soil to improve its structure. Like with pine bark, they are waste from another industry that we can use as gardeners. Like with coconut coir, there may be environmental impacts of transport but these should be less than with peat moss extraction.

## **Peat-Free Potting Mixes**

Many commercial potting mixes now come with peat-free formulations, using various combinations of the alternatives mentioned above. These mixes provide suitable growing mediums for various plants. Note, however, that some commercially available peat-free mixes might still contain non-renewable resources or synthetic materials. Checking the ingredients and sourcing sustainably produced mixes is important as a result.

## **Read More:**

- [5+ Cheap Ways to Make Soil More Acidic](#)
- [DIY Compost Using a 5-gallon Bucket](#)
- [Starting Seeds Inside: The Basic Guide](#)



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# Upcycling in the Garden: Everyday Items That Can Be Functional Garden Decorations



If you take a look around your home, or even in your recycling bin, then you will probably find items that you can use in your garden. This is, obviously, good for the earth. When you upcycle everyday items into functional garden decorations, it also saves you money. After all, you don't have to buy something to enjoy the function you're creating when you use something that you already have.

# **Benefits of Upcycling in the Garden**

Upcycling items for your garden has several benefits including:

## **Environmental Conservation**

Upcycling reduces waste and promotes sustainable practices. By repurposing or reusing items that would otherwise end up in landfills, you contribute to the conservation of natural resources. Moreover, you reduce the need for new production. Remember: reduce, re-use, recycle.

## **Financial Savings**

Obviously, we love frugal gardening options around here. Upcycling allows you to save money on purchasing new garden items. Instead, you can creatively transform everyday objects into functional garden decorations.

## **Unique and Personalized Garden Design**

Upcycling gives you the opportunity to create one-of-a-kind pieces for your garden. Each upcycled item becomes a unique feature, making your garden stand out. By repurposing different materials, you can add a personal touch and express your creativity.

## **Flexibility and Versatility**

Upcycling offers flexibility in terms of both design and functionality. The possibilities are endless. You can tailor your garden design to suit your preferences and needs.

## **Educational and Creative Experiences**

Upcycling provides an opportunity for learning and experimentation. It encourages you to think outside of the

box. This helps you to develop your problem-solving skills as you explore new ways to repurpose objects.

## **Encourages Gardening**

Upcycled items can make gardening more accessible and enjoyable. By getting your creative brain thinking about how you can repurpose items into functional garden decorations, you get more and more excited about getting out into the garden. It keeps things interesting as the old becomes new again.

## **Everyday Items That Can Be Functional Garden Decorations**

With enough creativity, you can repurpose just about any items into functional garden decorations. That said, here are some of the most popular everyday items to upcycle for the garden:

### **Old Tires**

You can use old tires in the garden in many ways. They can become:

- plant beds and raised planters
- fencing, edging or used as a retaining wall
- trellis or shelving for a vertical garden
- lawn furniture and tire swings
- steps or stairs

I also recently learned that you can use them to make a small pond. Dig a hole in the ground and place a large tire inside the hole. Then line the tire with a pond liner and fill it with water. You can even create a small water feature by adding aquatic plants and small fish, just be sure to include [Pond Pumps](#) and any other necessary equipment if you plan on expanding your pond and enhancing its features. This



is a great way to repurpose a large tire and attract wildlife to your garden. However, if you are looking for something a bit bigger than a tire for your pond, you'll need to ensure that you have the space of course. You don't have to go too big and can always keep it simple, but it would be nice to add something decorative that makes your garden stand out. Plus, you can add a plethora of additional features to your pond if it's bigger, such as [pond fountains](#) or mini-waterfalls.

## **Mason Jars**

Mason jars are great for creating hanging lanterns or tea light holders. They can also become candle holders or you can insert solar-powered LED lights into them. These enhance the ambiance of the space, of course. However, they also serve as functional garden decorations since they bring light to the space.

Other ways to use mason jars as functional garden decorations include:

### **Add An Herb Garden Section to Your Garden**

Fill mason jars with soil and different herbs. Hang the jars using twine. You can also use to create a hanging herb drying rack. Tie bundles of herbs together with twine and hang them upside down in the jars to dry.

### **Terrariums**

Build mini terrariums inside mason jars by layering rocks, charcoal, soil, and small plants such as succulents or air plants. The clear glass allows you to observe the tiny ecosystem. Terrariums can be displayed on tabletops or used as hanging gardens.

### **Seed Storage**

Use mason jars to store and organize your seeds. Label each jar with the seed type and date collected or purchased. The

airtight seal of the jars helps maintain seed viability and keeps them protected from moisture and pests.

## **Garden Tool Storage**

Attach mason jar lids to the underside of a shelf or a board in your garden shed or workspace. Screw the jars onto the lids, creating practical storage for small gardening tools, seeds, or other small items.

*Other everyday items that you can turn into functional garden decorations for tool storage include:*

- Wooden pallets, crates or boxes
- PVC pipes
- Buckets, bins, or other vessels
- Hanging shoe organizers
- Old aprons or purses with pockets

## **Plastic Bottles**

Plastic bottles can be upcycled in numerous ways:

### **Hanging Planters:**

Cut the top portion off a plastic bottle. Then poke holes in the bottom for drainage. Next, hang it upside down using string or wire. Fill it with soil and plant cascading flowers or herbs. Hang multiple bottles at different heights for an eye-catching vertical garden.

### **Self-Watering Planters**

Create self-watering planters by cutting a plastic bottle in half and inverting the top portion (with the cap removed) into the bottom half. Fill the bottom half with water and place it in a tray or container. Insert a wick, such as a cotton string or fabric, through the bottle cap and into the soil. This allows the plant to draw up water as needed.

## **Drip Irrigation System**

Make a DIY drip irrigation system by poking small holes in the bottom of a plastic bottle and burying it next to your plants. Fill the bottle with water. It will slowly release water into the soil.

*Wine bottles, plastic bags, used ice cream containers, PVC pipes, and old watering cans can also all be recycled into drip irrigation systems.*

## **Garden Edging**

Cut plastic bottles into strips or use them whole to create edging. Bury them vertically along the edge of your garden beds to create a decorative and functional border. The different colors and shapes of the bottles can add visual interest to your garden.

*You can also upcycle wine and beer bottles to create garden edging. Rope, twine, and bricks are also good choices if you have any around.*

## **Seed Starters**

Cut off the bottom section of a plastic bottle. Then use it as a mini greenhouse for seed starting. The clear plastic allows sunlight to penetrate while retaining moisture.

*Other great everyday items that you can turn into seed starters include egg cartons and newspaper.*

## **Bird Feeders**

Create a bird feeder by cutting out openings on the sides of a plastic bottle. Insert wooden dowels or sticks through the bottle for birds to perch on while they feed. Hang the bottle in a tree or attach it to a fence or post.

*You can also create bird feeders by recycling:*

- egg cartons
- toilet paper rolls
- pinecones
- chipped tea cups
- citrus halves!

## Plant Markers

Cut plastic bottles into rectangular shapes. Write the names of the herbs on the plastic with a permanent marker or paint. Then simply insert them into the soil next to each plant.

*Kitchen utensils also make great plant markers. Just write the information on the handle and stick the spoon, fork, knife, or spatula into the ground!*

## Read More:

- [Are Old Tires Toxic to Plants?](#)
- [45 Upcycling Ideas for the Garden](#)
- [5 Cheap Substitute for Seedling Trays](#)
- [50 Cool Upcycling Ideas for the Garden](#)
- [5 Ways Healthy Gardens Help the Planet](#)

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# Are Old Tires Toxic to Plants?



Some people like to use old tires in their gardening. However, you might wonder, “are old tires too toxic to plants?” It’s important to think about those things, especially if you eat food from your garden.

## How To Use Old Tires In Your Garden

There are so many [great, fun ways](#) to use old tires in a garden. You can create all kinds of fun garden decor and art like that shown above. Other ways to use old tires in your garden include:

- Hang a tire swing from a tree.
- Build a small playground for your kids or pets with old tires.
- Fill the center of tires with soil and plant in there for a unique plant bed.
- Hang tires to create shelving for a vertical garden.
- Build chairs, tables, and other lawn furniture from recycled tires.
- Use tires to create a big, dramatic garden border or

- fence or edge a pathway in your garden.
- Stack tires to create a retaining wall.

## Are Old Tires Toxic to Plants?

Lots of people like the options above for their gardens. They're fun. They keep tires out of landfills. It's a great way to make new use of something old. But, are old tires toxic to plants?

There's actually been [a lot of debate](#) about this in the gardening community over the years. Although there's been some research, we still don't have a clear answer that's absolutely definitive. On one hand, tires do obviously contain harmful chemicals that are toxic to humans. These chemicals leach into the soil over time. On the other hand, the leaching process is so slow, particularly on really old tires that have already done most of their chemical off-gassing during years on the road, that they're probably not actually harmfully toxic to most humans.

That's the argument on either side. If you ask specifically "are old tires toxic to plants," then the answer is basically no. The plants seem to still thrive. But if you want to know if they're toxic to you if you eat plants grown in them, the answer isn't as simple. Likely a little bit yes, enough to harm you – who knows?

If you have small children that play in the garden, pets that dig and romp in the garden, or you grow food in your garden, then you might want to err on the side of assuming that they could potentially be toxic.

## Alternatives to Old Tires in the



# Garden

If you want to be better safe than sorry, then you might want to consider alternatives to using old tires in the garden. [Lucy Bradley](#) recommends upcycling wood in the garden instead. Specifically, she recommends non-treated wood, ACQ pressure-treated wood, and naturally rot-resistant wood. You can use wood to build planters, raised beds, fences, vertical gardens, and playgrounds in the garden. The important thing is that you make sure you choose wood that hasn't been exposed to chemical treatments.

Likewise, you can upcycle stone, concrete, and bricks. Again, you just want to make sure that these recycled materials weren't first exposed to chemicals like lead-based paint or asbestos. Think of it this way: if you wouldn't use it in your house then you probably don't want to use it in your garden.

## Read More:

- [5 Reasons To use Fish Amino Acids on Your Plants](#)
- [Frugal Container Garden](#)
- [The Number One Tenant of Frugal Gardening](#)