

PEATLAND Justice

Ancient ecosystems.

Irreplaceable carbon stores.

What are PEATLANDS and why do they matter?

Peatlands are unique ecosystems formed over thousands of years, made of layer upon layer of plant matter that cannot fully decompose because of the high levels of water.

This makes them **vital carbon stores**: peatlands cover just 3% of the world's land surface but store 30% of all terrestrial carbon. Intact peatlands actively remove carbon from the atmosphere and lock it away for millennia. Altogether, they store **twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined**.

They are also biodiversity hotspots, providing refuge for rare and threatened species and crucial habitat for migratory birds. Beyond ecology, peatlands hold immense cultural and social value: preserving archaeology and paleoecology, sustaining livelihoods, supporting mental wellbeing, and inspiring art and literature. They are also vital water regulators, storing rainfall and releasing it slowly to prevent floods, droughts, and water pollution.

Protecting peatlands is essential for people, other species, and the planet.

Stolen for profit.

What is peat extraction and what damage does it cause?

Today, peatlands are mined on a massive scale to supply potting soil and growing media for horticulture, hobby gardening, and the flower industry.

The extraction process has severe environmental consequences: releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere, destroying habitats, and increasing flood risk. These impacts are felt locally and globally, while industry profits.

Peat became a go-to ingredient for industrial agriculture in the 1900s because it was cheap, predictable, good at holding water, and free of pathogens. But the real price of peat has never been accounted for: accelerating the climate crisis, draining freshwater reserves, wiping out habitats, and severing our connection to living soil.

Europe is a major player: more than 80% of all global peat extraction takes place here. Huge amounts are extracted from the Baltics and sold to companies in Western Europe — including the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

Key actors in the supply chain include **retail companies and supermarkets such as Ahold Delhaize and Albert Heijn**, which continue to stock peat-containing potting soils, potted plants, and herbs — despite the huge environmental cost and despite their own sustainability pledges.

How does the peat industry use greenwashing to protect its profits?

The peat industry portrays extraction as harmless and necessary, using narratives that make peat sound abundant, renewable, and even climate-friendly. It suggests peatlands can simply be restored after mining and dismisses independent science that shows otherwise. These tactics mirror those of the fossil fuel industry: exaggerating future solutions, downplaying present harm, and sowing doubt to delay change.

In reality, the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** classifies peat as a **fossil resource** and warns its use is incompatible with climate goals. Peat takes thousands of years to form, releases huge amounts of carbon when mined, and cannot be replaced within human timescales.

Its extraction for horticulture has been recognised as environmentally destructive for decades — yet it remains widespread across Europe.

Protecting peatlands is essential; greenwashing only serves to shield destructive practices.

A peat-free future is already here

The destructive extraction and trade in peat must end. We need systemic solutions: individual consumer choices and voluntary phase-outs are not enough to stop industrial mining or hold companies accountable.

We urgently need to move away from peat in potting soil. The good news is: the alternatives already exist. Gardeners and growers are proving every day that composted green waste, wood fibre, bark, and leaf mulch can grow strong, healthy plants without destroying peatlands. Some retailers and producers are already committing to peat-free products, showing that a different path is not only possible but practical.

What's missing is political and corporate will; to scale up solutions, set clear timelines, stop hiding behind greenwashed excuses, and support those who need help in the transition, from small-scale growers to agroecological producers.

A peat-free future is not a dream: it is already happening. The faster we make the switch, the more carbon stays in the ground, the more species we protect, and the more resilient our communities will be.

From peat-free to system change

RE-PEAT is pushing for a **phase-out and ban on peat extraction** for the horticultural industry. This can be a catalyst for wider transformation, not just swapping one input for another, but shifting the way our food and growing systems work.

We want a horticultural system based on three principles of regenerative, peat-free soil:

- **Ecological**: local, renewable, circular
- **Effective**: reliable, available
- **Fair**: living wage, transparent, affordable

The fight for Peatland Justice needs your support! Join us in ending extraction, challenging false narratives, and building alternatives rooted in ecology and solidarity.

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While
PEATLANDS
cover only **3%**
of earth's land,
they store twice as much
carbon as **all of the**
world's forests
combined.

