



ALLOTMENT & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

NEWSLETTER APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2025

As most of you know the SCC decided to raise the rents on allotment plots by 25% in January 2025. This they said was to cover the loss they make annually. The Committee wrote a letter to the council making representation to try and get answers as to how monies could be saved to help lessen the rent rise. We also had representation at the full Council Meeting and spoke about moving the rent payments to April to help members who had problems paying in January. One of our members Matt Vass was also looking into the allotment acts of 1908 and 1955. This proved to be the catalyst to being able to put forward an argument which proved they had to give plot holders 12 months' notice before they could raise rents. At a meeting on 4 February arranged between the SCC, A&GAS, Cllr Chris Taylor and having written input from Matt Vass via the Freedom of Information act the SCC agreed to move the payment month from January to April and not to implement any rent rises until April 2026 also to investigate ways to work with A&GAS to help cut their costs.

We will be having ongoing meetings and looking at all ways to cut costs with the help of the Wardens.

Harry Theobald editor.

19th Summer Show

The show will be held on Saturday 16th August. The schedule and entry form are now available in the Trading Hut and on the website.

Talks

We will not be having any talks in 2025. We have put details of other talks being arranged by some local gardening clubs and the NVS on our website.

Outings

We are hoping to go on three outings in 2025. The first trip is to Bowood House and Gardens on Sunday 18th May. We only had 25 spaces and they have all been sold.

The second outing is to The Garden Show at Romsey on Sunday 8th June. The ticket prices are £25 per member and £25 for 1 quest and £30 each for non-members. The price includes coach travel, entrance to the show and the driver's gratuity. The coach will leave from Harnham Cricket Ground at 9am and the Coach Station at 9.15am, leaving Romsey at 4pm. We still have tickets left and they can be purchased from the Trading Hut on Saturday or Sunday between 9.30am to 12.30pm.

We are looking to go to RHS Wisley later in the year.

Trading Hut

Continuing to be a member of the Association makes a lot of sense especially when you compare the prices of our products with local stores in and around Salisbury. Our shop manager Keith Lawrence is forever planning and looking at bargains to pass onto our members. Our membership figures are on the rise compared with this time last year and we need current members to help pass on to non-members on their plots the advantages and benefits of membership as with more revenue we can get better deals from our suppliers. Just to remind you all to bring your membership cards which need to be shown before you can purchase any of the products on display in the shop.

We trialled opening on a Wednesday evening between 6pm and 8pm in 2024 to give all members especially the ones who work the chance to visit the shop and purchase goods. This was very successful, and we will be continuing this year starting on Wednesday April 23rd.

Allotment and Scarecrow Competitions

The Best Salisbury Allotment and Scarecrow Competitions are going to continue in 2025. These popular competitions are again being run by A&GAS. The Association wants to continue to make it a fun event while encouraging experienced gardeners and those new to growing their own, to share their achievements. Both competitions are free to enter and open to anybody with an allotment on any Salisbury City Council (SCC) site. The Scarecrow Competition is open to adults, children of all ages and groups and the scarecrow must be on a SCC allotment site or displayed on Black Crow Meadow to be eligible. Entry is free and the judging of both competitions will take place from the 21st to the 29th of June, you can enter either or both competitions. The closing date for entries is 1pm on 18th June 2025. Entry forms and the judging criteria are available on the A&GAS website at www.salisburyallotments.co.uk with paper copies available during opening hours from the A&GAS Trading Hut. Winners will be notified in July, and presentations will be made at the A&GAS Summer Show United Reformed Church

Fisherton Street on 16 August 2025. If you require more information, please ask in the Trading Hut or contact Lindsey by email at bellringer77@btinternet.com.

SNIPPETS

Garden Shows for 2025

Harrogate Spring Flower Show 24-27 April. RHS Malvern Spring Festival 8-11 May, RHS Chelsea Flower Show 20-24 May, Scone Palace Garden Fair 30-31 May, Gardeners World Live 12-15 June, Blenheim Palace Flower Show 27-29 June, RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival 1-6 July, RHS Flower Show Wentworth Woodhouse 16-20 July, Harrogate Autumn Show 19-21 September, RHS Malvern Autumn Show 26-28 September.

The Councils 'What 3 words' to be used on allotment sites to summon emergency vehicles to an incident: The Butts **Shots. Bump. analogy.** Coldharbour Lane **Menu. part. rings.** Cow Lane **Sketch. excuse. risks.** Fisherton A **Fade. thing. guard.** Fisherton B **Solid. arena. punt** Fisherton C **Moss. organs. dates.** Fisherton D **Grades. yappy. trip.** London Road **Famous. rust. taps.** Stratford Road **Subway. lizard. surnames** The Tunnel **Shield. fades. chin,** Warres Acre **Habit. sailor. scales** Westwood **Swims. somewhere. departure** Wiltshire Road **Trials. affair. prone**

A new exhibition at Kew Gardens will celebrate forests. 'The Power of Trees' will include botanic art, including 20 new paintings of conifers at the Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest. Bedgebury was created 100 years ago is now home to 12,000 trees. For details, visit www.kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-on

Scotland is getting a brand new gardening show. The National Gardening & Outdoor Living Show will be held at The Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh from 26-27 July. Up to 40 nurseries will be selling their plants and there will also be a fruit and veg show, plus talks and workshops. In addition to gardening, there are koi carp and caravanning exhibits. Tickets cost £15. With free entry for children under 16. Visit www.plantout.co.uk for details.

Worm castings producer Wormganix, waste management company Veolia and a Starbucks branch in Bradford are working on a trial that uses worms to recycle paper waste and spent coffee grounds. It's hoped the worms will digest this everyday waste and turn it into a nutrient-rich fertiliser.

This book *The New Romantic Garden* is a heartfelt love letter from a world-renowned garden designer to her garden. Interspersed with the horticultural experiences she's had along the way, Jo Thompson allows the reader to submerge themselves in her thoughtful and considered approach to gardens, plants, her design philosophy, and the special relationship formed from this most loving art form. Published by Rizzoli International Publications in February 2025 at RRP £40.

In her new book *How to Grow a Garden*, broadcaster and gardener Frances Tophill passes on her passion for nature and wants to show children how magical nature can be and explains what grown-up gardeners can learn from kids. Published by Magic Cat in February 2025 priced at £14.99

If you've ever perused a seed catalogue and paused to puzzle over what some of the perplexing little codes such as F1 or PBR after the plant names mean, this is the book to read. It demystifies a part of horticulture that gardeners rarely get a glimpse of - plant breeding and seed production. *The Accidental Seed Heroes* by Adam Alexander is Published by Chelsea Green, in March 2025 RRP £20.

Kitchen gardener Jamie Walton - aka Instagram's *Nettles & Petals* - is an ecological grower, as his first book *Grow Food, Eat, Weeds, Save Seeds* hits the shelves, he explains the biodiverse balance on his plot. *Nettles & Petals*, Published by Leaping Hare in March RRP £16.99

More than a thousand trees, largely sycamore but also cherry, oak and crab apple, have been planted on the Swinton Estate near Masham, North Yorks as a direct result of the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree on Hadrian's Wall. Artist Lucy Pittaway created a piece commemorating the iconic tree, pledging that for every print sold one tree would be planted at Swinton.

Several nurseries have been granted Royal Warrants for their ongoing supply of goods and services to the Royal Household. The list includes Langthorns Plantery, which sells a wide range of plants: Millais Nursery. Which specialises in rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias: the Guernsey Clematis Nursery, the wholesale arm of Raymond Evison Clematis: and Emorsgate Seeds, which sells wildflower seeds, Sutton Seeds, Taylors Bulbs, Eagle Sweet Peas and Hillier Nurseries were also honoured.

Following its announcement in October of store closures, Dobbies has now had its restructuring plan approved. The operator shuttered several of its garden centres in December with at least 10 due to reopen in spring under new management. The Pennine store in Huddersfield is to become part of the Yorkshire Garden Centres Group. Stratford Garden Centre will take over the Warwick Road site in Stratford-upon-Avon, while Squires Garden Centre has bought the Hare Hatch facility in

Berkshire. British Garden Centres has also acquired three of the stores - in Gloucester, Gosforth and Reading. Meanwhile, Dobbies recently opened flagship garden centre in Antrim, which had been scheduled for closure, has had a reprieve after the firm reached an agreement with landlords.

Products

Melcourt is adding a new seed compost to its range. SylvaGrow Seed Compost is suitable for a wide range of seeds for the first three to four weeks of life. Melcourt multipurpose composts can be used for sowing and raising seeds but need to be sieved for fine seeds and watered from above.

Which Best Buys and recommended:

Plant Suppliers rated: David Austin Roses, Ashridge Trees, Burncoose, Brookside Nursery, RHS Plants/Crocus, Marshalls Garden (inc Unwins), Pomona Fruits.

Cucumbers on test: 'Carmen' F1, 'Euphya', 'Bon Odori', 'Lili' F1, 'Sensation' aka Lungo Verde Degli Ortolani, 'Bella' F1, 'Burpless Tasty Green' F1, 'Chompers' F1, 'Femspot' F1.

Choosing the right lawnmower: Corded Electric: Bosch Advanced Rotak 750, Mac Allister MLM1334 Corded Rotary, Cordless: EgoLM1903E-SP, Worx WG743E.1, Petrol: Cobra MX515SPBI, Cobra M51SPC, Robot: Bosch Indego M 700, Gardena Sileno Minimo 250.

Best buy Garden Shredders on test: Draper Electric Garden Shredder 230V (£188)

Hedge trimmers recommended on test: Stihl HSE 52 (£170), Ego HTX5300-P (£399), Einhell ARCURRA 18/55 3410920 (£90)

Best buy and recommended composts for sowing seeds on test: Coco & Coir All Purpose, Fothergill's Enriched Seed Compost, Moorland Gold Seed & Cutting, Westland John Innes Peat Free Seed Sowing Compost, Sarah Raven Peat Free Compost

Best buy and recommended compost for patio pots on test: Melcourt SylvaGrow Tub & Basket, Thompson & Morgan incredipeatfree, East Grow Compost, Moorland Gold Multipurpose Compost, FertilerFibre Original Multipurpose Compost, New Horizon All Plant Compost, Notcutts Peat Free All-Purpose Compost Westland Peat Free All-Purpose Compost with John Innes.

Best buy and recommended compost for young plants. Easy Grow Compost, Professional peat-based compost (benchmark). Coco & Coir All Purpose, Thompson & Morgan incredipeatfree, FertileFibre Original Multipurpose Compost, Notcutts Peat Free All-Purpose Compost, Sarah Raven Peat-Free Compost.

Best buy and recommended Potatoes for roasting on test: 'Desiree', 'Java', 'King Edward', 'Oscar', 'Navan', 'Cara', 'Rooster'.

Best buy Garden Machinery on test: Hedge trimmers Stihl HLA 56 (£219), Grass trimmers RY18LT33A-O 18V ONE+ 33cm EasyEdge Line Trimmer (£150), Pressure washers Karcher K7 Compact (£385). Garden shredders RY36SHX40-O (648)

Best buy and recommended Strawberries on test: 'Sonata', 'Sweet Sensation', 'Symphony', 'Christine', 'Flamenco', 'Korona'.

Best buy Seed Suppliers rated: Real Seeds, Kings Seeds, Chiltern Seeds, Simply Seeds, D.T. Brown.

Best buy Plug Plant Suppliers rated: Brookside Nursery, D.T. Brown, RHS/Crocus, Sarah Raven.

Best buy and recommended Daisies on test: Rudbeckia hirta 'Aries' yellow, maroon, Rudbeckia hirta 'Cherry Brandy. Red, Tithonia 'Torchlight' orange, Tithonia 'Goldfinger' orange, Zinnia 'Zahara Single Mix' pink, orange, yellow, white. Zinnia 'Zahara Sunburst', red, orange. Zinnia 'Benary's Giant White' white, Arctotis fastuosa white, Calendula 'Indian Prince' orange, Coreopsis 'Incredible Swirl' white, Maroon, Dahlia 'Bishops Children' red, orange, pink, Gaillardia aristata 'Single Flowered Mix', red, yellow, Helianthus 'Ms Mars', maroon, pink. Zinnia 'Dahlia Flowered Mix, pink, purple, red, yellow.

Best buy cordless Grass trimmers on test: Stihl FSA 80 (3395), Greenworks GWGD60LTK2 (3340), Stihl FSA 60R (£329)

Best buy Pressure Washers on test: Husqvarna pw 480 (£549), Nilfisk Premium 180 (£469).

Flavour is what makes homegrown tomatoes stand out from ones bought from the supermarket: From Which trials over the years here is a round-up of the tastiest. **Outdoor and blight resistant:** 'Consuelo' F1, 'Goldwin Golden Cocktail', 'Rubylicious' F1 **Salad** 'Red Zebra', 'Shimmer' F1, 'Shirley. F1, 'Bliss' F1, **Cherry** 'Rubinka', 'Apero' F1, 'Sweet Million' F1, 'Rapunzel' F1, **Beefsteak** 'Burlesque' F1, Honey Moon; F1, Plum 'Olivade' F1, 'Roma', **Hanging Basket** , 'Montello' F1, Romello; F1, 'Tumbling Tom' F1.

Plant Pests and Diseases

Slugs and snails are the bane of a garden's life - and in a mild and wet year, the damage can be devastating. One way to minimise the problem is to grow plants that they won't eat or will rarely touch. Here is a list of some of these slug - resistant plants and suggest some Best Buys to look out for. 1. Anemone Hupehensis Var. Japonica 'PAMINA', 2. Adiantum Venustum, 3. Agapanthus 'MIDNIGHT BLUE', 4. Bergenia 'ADMIRAL', 5. Dianthus 'DEVON WIZARD', 6. Digitalis Purpurea 'CAMELOT ROSE', 7. Fuchsia Magellanica 'ARAUCO', 8. Geranium 'BLUE CLOUD', 9. Helleborus 'ANNA'S RED', 10. Hylotelephium

Telephium 'XENOX', **11.** L. vanderhagei 'LODDEN BLUE', **12.** Paeonia Lactiflora 'BOWL OF BEAUTY', **13.** Penstemon 'PENSHAM JUST JANE', **14.** Salvia Microphylla 'CERRO POTOSI'.

A top tip for rose growers it is best to water roses in the morning rather than evening but be careful not to splash their leaves as this can cause black spot.

Environment.

A huge tree planting effort by the National Trust and England's Community Forests will have planted around 416,000 trees by the end of March. Trees at 20 projects across England - the largest of which is on former council land at Sefton, Merseyside - will create 519 hectares of new woodland habitats.

High levels of fertiliser use on grassland halve pollinator numbers and drastically reduce the number of flowers, according to research by the University of Sussex and Rothamsted Research. The research looked at strips of grassland that have been studied since 1856 and made a direct link between increasing fertiliser and decreasing pollinator numbers. This is primarily because fertilisers allow fast-growing grasses to dominate, crowding out other grasses and flowers.

All non-black, recyclable polyethylene terephthalate (PET) or Polypropylene (PP) plastic plant pots will be accepted in household kerbside recycling in England from 2026, following a campaign by the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA). Liz Williams, sustainability executive at the HTA, said: 'Although this policy currently covers England, with a proposed extension to Wales, we hope it will serve as a blueprint for the entire UK, reducing inconsistencies and simplifying recycling for consumers and business'. In the meantime. The easiest way to recycle plant pots is to reuse them at home. Many garden centres also offer recycling collections, or you may find community gardening groups on social media that may take them.

Plants

See 48 different *Tillandsia* (air plants) in the last year of their RHS trial at Walton Hall and Gardens, Cheshire. Primarily the silver-leaved forms grown as air plants, they're being assessed for their growing habit, how readily they flower and how long for. The best will gain an RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). For more details visit www.rhs.org.uk/tillandsiatrial

Plant Heritage is asking gardeners across the UK to enter rare or unusual plants into its annual Threatened Plant of the year Competition by 30 April 2025. Anyone from hobbyist gardeners to professionals, can submit up to five cultivars that are growing in their gardens but are no longer for sale. The winner will be announced at RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival in July. For more info visit www.plantheritage.org.uk/conservation/threatened-plant-of-the-year-2025

Six new and established cultivars of overwintering violas have been given an RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). 'Bel Viso Beacon Flash', 'Bel Viso Deep Marina', 'Bel Viso Yellow Jump Up', 'Floral Power Blue Picotee', 'Rocky Denim Jump Up' and 'Sorbet XP Delft Blue' all formed neat, strong plants and flowered prolifically for a long time over winter. The plants were part of a follow-on trial at RHS Wisley in Surrey. In spring 2022, a wider trial of spring-flowering violas was held at the Floral Fantasia Garden. RHS Hyde Hall, Essex. The 16 best varieties from that were then planted again at Wisley in November 2023. They were assessed until the following June to see which were hardy enough to give a good show through winter. Seeds of the new AGMs aren't available to buy yet, but you should be able to find most of them as plants in garden centres.

Fleuroselect, which runs plant trials aimed at marketing new plants to the horticultural industry, has chosen two new gold medal winners for 2026. *Salvia splendens* 'Estrella Coral' is a new kind of annual salvia with bigger, bushier plants and longer flower spikes with the blooms spaced further apart. This is meant to make it more wildlife friendly as bees are better able to reach the flowers. It's also said to bloom a week earlier than other *S. splendens* varieties. It's grown from seed, so expect to see it in garden centres next year. The other gold medal goes to a seed-grown dahlia. *Dahlia* 'Black Forest Ruby' has black leaves and open-centred flowers with a double row of petals. It's said to flower for a long time and the plants are quite uniform. Seeds are already on sale at Fothergill's, Kings Seeds. Plants of Distinction and Thompson & Morgan.

Garden plant conservation charity Plant Heritage has accredited two new national plant collections that were previously listed as missing and at risk of being lost from cultivation forever. The new national collection of oriental poppies (*Papaver orientale*) which consists of 38 varieties from hot pink to deep red, can be seen in a private garden in Somerset. In neighbouring Dorset, 45 cultivars of elephant's ears (*Colocasia*), which are kept in a greenhouse, are now protected for the future. Three significant tree collections have also been accredited. In Staffordshire, the National Memorial Arboretum now holds 262 witch hazel (*Hamamelis*) and 102 amelanchier varieties. The arboretum worked closely with existing collection holder, Chris Lane, who propagated many of his own plants. On the Isle of Wight, Ventnor Botanic Garden's collection of 70 eucalyptus cultivars were planted in the 1970s and most are now county or national champion trees on the Tree Register.

Four robust red roses battled terrible weather and a reduction in intervention during a three-year garden trial at RHS Wisley to get a prestigious Award of Garden Merit. They are **Rosa** Cayenne, **Rosa** Eternity, **Rosa** Lovestruck and **Rosa** W. B. Yeats.

After a trial beset by extreme weather at RHS Garden Bridgewater in Salford, eight tough and long-flowering primulas were given an Award of Garden Merit (AGM). Primula 'Dark Rosaleen', P. 'Gareth', P. 'Groenekan's Glorie', P. 'Hall Barn Blue', P. Iris Mainwaring', P. 'MacWatt's Cream', P. vulgaris 'Drumcliffe', P. vulgaris 'Lilacina Plena' stood out for their overall looks and how they fared in the harsh conditions.

Wildlife

The National Water Vole Monitoring Programme celebrates its 10th anniversary this year and is asked for your help to record sightings of water voles. The rodent is officially Britain's fastest declining mammal. To take part in the survey, visit www.ptes.org/get-involved/surveys

Dragonflies, damselflies and a rare eel have been helped by a pond restoration project at Castle Fraser in Scotland. The pond is one of the few habitats in Scotland where the azure damselfly and the northern damselfly are found, alongside other closely related species. The project has helped protect their environment. A critically endangered European eel was also found while repairs to the lining of the pond were taking place. It's thought to be between 30 to 60 years old and had travelled to northern Scotland from its spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea. Non-native fish, thought to have been released by a visitor, were also found and removed.

A University of Bristol study has found that gardens in rural areas provide 50-95% of food for pollinators when nectar from farmland is scarce, particularly in early spring and late summer. With more than 90% of British farmland within 1km of a garden, planting flowers to bloom at these times can be a vital food source.

How you can help support the rare Hazel Dormouse. Dormice live mostly in woodlands but have also been recorded snacking on soft fruit and bird feeders in gardens. **Be messy:** Keep your garden a bit scrubby in order to attract the aphids and caterpillars that dormice feed on in summer. **Go native:** Plant a native, mixed hedge filled with fruiting species. In spring dormice feed on the flowers of hawthorn, hazel, honeysuckle, bramble and dog rose they then enjoy their fruits in autumn. **Get connected:** Cut a hole in the fence to create a wildlife corridor to enable dormice to travel between gardens and woodlands.

Reporting and eradication measures in the UK have been effective in limiting numbers of Asian Hornets. The UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology led a study predicting the spread of the invasive species if no action was taken. Despite numerous sightings every year, the insect - a predator of honeybees - is less widespread in the UK than feared. The study put this down to effective reporting of sightings, both online and via the Asian Hornet Watch app, followed by destruction of any nests.

Gardens

Research by the University of Cambridge suggests that botanic gardens are running out of space to conserve the rarest and most endangered species. Cambridge University Botanical Garden Curator Professor Sam Brockington said: 'Botanic Gardens are full. We're running out of space and resources. The risk of extinction is accelerating, and our response is too slow.' At the same time, international restrictions on plant collecting are impeding efforts to study plant diversity.

Preparations are underway for the renovation of the Palm House at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, which will start this spring. Two new behind-the-scenes greenhouses have been erected to propagate and store plants while the main greenhouse, which was built in 1844, is refurbished.

Inverary Castle, in the West Highlands of Scotland, has been named the 2024 Historic Houses Garden of the Year in a public vote. The 16-acre garden, which has lawns and flowerbeds around the castle, is home to azaleas and rhododendrons, with conifers in its woodlands and parklands.

World-renowned landscape gardener Tom Stuart-Smith is helping to design a new garden at the Royal High School Building on Carlton Hill, Edinburgh. It's set to be the first new public garden to open in the city centre for more than 200 years. One part of it will take inspiration from the local wild landscape and feature native trees such as birch, rowan and Scots pine. The other part will have a flower garden and a large pergola. The garden will be free to visit.

Greenfingers Charity, which creates gardens in children's hospices, celebrates its silver anniversary this year. It recently received a donation from the Horticultural Trades Association for just over £14,500 raised through the National Garden Gift Card scheme. Garden Industry Manufacturer's Association president Kate Ebbens also raised over £330,000 by running 5km every day in 2024.

The Barbican Conservatory, the largest greenhouse in central London, will be restored in a new project. Urgent repairs are needed to the structure, which is largely concrete and glass. The work will also update the systems needed to grow tropical plants and will make the space accessible for all. As part of the process, the extensive and varied planting will be renewed, led by designers Harris Bugg, together with a team of horticultural and heritage experts.

Science

Scientists at Henan University in China have developed a new method for making fertiliser from human urine in a few simple steps. Researchers passed electricity through a urea solution, causing crystals of nitrogen-rich percarbamide to form on sheets of graphite. These crystals were easily separated and found to help wheat, peanuts and lettuce plants grow taller. Human urine is rich in nitrogen which is essential for plant growth, but extracting it chemically is usually less efficient than the energy-intensive industrial methods of making fertiliser.

Royal Botanical Gardens Kew has released a list of 149 plants and 23 fungi from around the world identified as being new to science in 2024. Some were discovered on plant hunting expeditions, while others were found by carrying out DNA analysis of known species. They include three fungi from the UK that have teeth-like structures instead of the more usual gills. They were found in broadleaf forests near Royal Tunbridge Wells and Windsor, and in conifer forests in Scotland.

LATEST UPDATE ON FUTURE OF PEAT FREE COMPOST

A private members' bill to ban the sale of peat is currently going through Parliament.

Sarah Dyke, MP for Glastonbury and Somerton used the 10-minute rule motion to introduce the Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill and called for a ban by the end of 2025. In her speech, she cited the role of peat bogs in storing large amounts of carbon, saying: 'Drained deep peat is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and, along with peat extraction, could be responsible for as much as 255,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year, according to a 2023 report published by EFTEC (Economics for the Environment Consultancy)'. She also pointed to the rare habitats created by peat bogs, saying they might mitigate the effects of flooding by soaking up large amounts of water. She accepted that nurseries would need time to adapt and that exemptions should be made for growing some plants. She called for more consultation with the horticultural industry, but said many professional growers, retailers and compost manufacturers are already calling for a ban to become law.

Bagged peat compost sold through retail was set to be banned by the end of 2024, but no legislation was drafted. In response, the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) said that little peat is currently sold through retail, but asked MPs to consider tree and plant producers, who need more time to make the switch. The HTA also called for grants to fund peat-free trials and to replace equipment. It wants to extend the use of peat until 2030 for most growers, with some exceptions. The bill will have its next reading on the 24 January. Few private members' bills become law, but its progress will be monitored.

Meanwhile, the RHS trials into peat-free growing are showing positive results. At a recent event, the RHS shared results of trials taking place with help from eight commercial growers and six compost manufacturers. These showed peat-free plants were as good or better than those grown in peat. Also at the event, the chair of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS), Steve Harper, said the RSS is working on a plan to test all composts to show they meet the necessary benchmarks for performance and consistency. But it will be some years before it is able to publish results.

A second reading of the private member's bill introducing a ban on peat compost, which was due to take place in January, has been postponed. The delay will allow for more time to consult with the horticultural industry. Three industry insiders were asked whether a ban is likely to drive new high-quality products. Elaine Gotts, research & development scientist and Levington Research Station coordinator at Evergreen Garden Care said: 'There's a risk the opposite could happen, as there are finite quantities of high-quality alternatives available. By taking the lead in changing our full production to peat-free, Evergreen has secured materials for our consumers, but this may not be the case for those brands that feature peat within their products.' Catherine Dawson, senior associate at Melcourt, was cautiously optimistic: 'Despite some badly developed products that do immense harm to the image of the sector, in general, the overall quality (of peat free compost) is getting better.' Both pointed to the importance of adapting watering and feeding practices to peat-free growing, Gott Said: 'While peat remains on offer, the changes in cultural practice (watering and feeding) needed for success will be more difficult to achieve.' Dawson told us: 'We're beginning to see specialist fertilisers being offered. The best advice is stick with one you like and get to know it.' They both pointed to initiatives from the RHS and environmental innovator 'Sizzle' to offer advice on peat-free growing. The RHS has launched a free service to help answer questions from all gardeners who want tips for success with peat-free growing. The queries will be tackled via email by Nikki Barker, RHS Peat Free Transition Technical Co-ordinator at www.peatfree@rhs.org.uk, There are also articles on watering needs for peat-free growing at www.rhs.org.uk/science/articles/peat-free-irrigation. Which Gardening has also carried out several technique trials to help readers. Read their free-to-view guide at www.which.co.uk/peat-free-compost