



An Eight Step Guide to joining the Growing Media Initiative



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Glossary

Introduction

Peat is an excellent growing medium for plants and has been used by the UK's horticultural industry since the 1960s. However, peat is also a precious natural resource. It provides an important habitat for wildlife and supports a rich and rare biodiversity. In addition, peat bogs are an important carbon store, storing approximately double the amount of carbon contained in the world's forests. Extracting peat releases CO₂ into the atmosphere.

Thus, the Growing Media Initiative (GMI) was established in 2007 to help reduce the use of peat in horticulture, and to provide a practical, industry-led scheme to facilitate the change.

The GMI's focus is on the amateur gardener market which consumes 69% of the total peat used in horticulture in the UK. Bags of multipurpose composts and other growing media have traditionally contained a large percentage of peat. Gardeners who buy these products often don't realise the proportion of peat in the bags they are buying. And in spite of an improving range of good quality and competitively priced peat alternatives, we're still consuming peat in the same volumes as we did a decade ago as a result of overall market growth.

The GMI scheme exists to help manufacturers and retailers reduce the amount of peat they use. The scheme has already attracted major players in the industry who have made significant progress on peat reduction. However, there remains a long way to go to reach new Government targets of zero peat by 2020.

If you want to prepare your business for a peat-free future, taking your customers with you, and you want to demonstrate your environmental credentials, then this guide is for you. It explains the 8 easy steps you will need to take to become a member of the Growing Media Initiative, and the support and benefits you can expect from joining the network. These include the use of the GMI logo to demonstrate your leadership role and raise the profile of your environmental credentials amongst your customers and business peers.

New members are critical to the GMI's overall success. We therefore welcome your interest in the scheme, and encourage you to take the first steps towards peat reduction.

Horticultural Trades Association

September 2011

The 8 steps to becoming a GMI member

1. Know the quantity of peat you sell
2. Know the quantity of peat you buy
3. Set goals, targets and an action plan
4. Establish a system of working
5. State your intentions in a public statement and policy
6. Work with your suppliers to bring about change
7. Train your staff and communicate with your customers
8. Monitor progress and review how successful you've been

Step 1: SALES

Know what you sell

Your starting point is to know how much product you're selling. These figures will be used to track progress against your annual target to reduce sales of peat-based products (see Step 4).

If you run electronic point of sales systems (EPOS), this will be quite straightforward. If you don't, you'll need to describe how you categorise different types of growing media and soil improvers on your till system and how you record your daily/weekly/monthly sales.

Ideally, you will give all growing media and soil improvement products a unique product code or stock keeping unit (SKU), assigning sub-categories such as peat free, bark mulches, multi-purpose etc.

You'll also need to demonstrate how you've arrived at your figures. Producing monthly sales reports to demonstrate you are managing sales documentation and conducting regular reviews will provide the evidence you need for GMI Clause 2.10.

There is also a need for a written procedure clearly identifying all the steps you have taken to arrive at your sales figures. As a guide use the RACI model explained in step 4 to break down all the stages and to identify who is responsible (see appendix 4 for example of a peat monitoring and reduction procedure)

GMI REQUIREMENTS

Documents required for GMI membership

- ✓ Monthly and yearly sales figures (calendar year)
- ✓ Periodic sales reports including stock take figures
- ✓ List of products sold with their unique bar codes

GMI Clause 2.8

The Company shall have documentary evidence of the volumes of bagged growing medium and soil improver sold

GMI Clause 2.5

There shall be a clearly defined procedure outlining how the Company has determined levels of peat reduction and how this will be monitored

GMI Clause 2.10

After year one there shall be documentary evidence that the proportion of peat within bagged growing media and soil improver has been reduced within the calendar year compared to the previous year

Step 2: PURCHASES

Know what you buy

It's not just about how many bags of growing media/soil improvement product you've bought. You'll also need to know the ratio of peat to non-peat in each bag. Knowing where your peat comes from is vitally important and that it conforms to the GMI sourcing policy (see appendix 1 for copy of GMI policy)

Ask your suppliers:

- For information about the peat content and the specification of each product (see appendix 2)
- If they can generate sales reports (by site if you operate from multiple sites)
- To supply their BOPP Growing media Producers Standard or GMI certificates if they are signed up to these standards or Initiatives
- To write to you on headed paper confirming their peat sourcing policy conforms to GMI policy if they're not members of BOPP or GMI.

**% peat per bag of growing media x
volume of bags sold per product=
total peat sold per year**

GMI REQUIREMENTS

Document checklist

- ✓ Total purchases from all suppliers in last calendar year, including purchase orders or deliver notes and letters from your suppliers confirming totals sold to you in the last calendar year
- ✓ Product specifications confirming bag size, % of each main ingredient
- ✓ Copies of suppliers' BOPP or GMI membership certificates or written confirmation that your suppliers conform to GMI sourcing policy
- ✓ Copy of your suppliers' policies if they're not members of BOPP or GMI

GMI Clause 2.9

The Company shall have documentary evidence of the peat content (actual volume or percentage) of each type of bagged growing medium and soil improver sold

GMI Clause 3.2

There shall be documentary evidence that suppliers of growing media and soil improver products that contain peat are either certificated to the BOPP Growing Media Producers Standard (i.e. copy of supplier's BOPP certificate) or comply with the GMI Peat Sourcing Policy

Step 3: GOALS AND TARGETS AND ACTION PLAN

Define your aspirations

You can now set yourself a five-year goal with annual targets to reduce the amount of peat you sell.

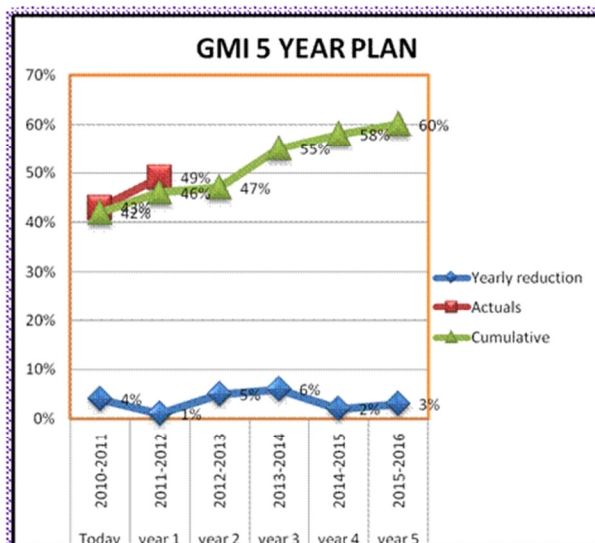
To be eligible for Provisional Membership of the GMI, you must be at least 20% peat-free in the total volume of your growing media and soil improver sales. This is reasonably straightforward to achieve for most businesses. Provisional members are required to qualify for full membership (see below) within three years of joining the scheme.

To be eligible for Full Membership of the GMI, you must be at least 55% peat-free in the total volume of your growing media and soil improver sales. To retain full membership, you'll need to demonstrate a further 10% reduction in your total peat volume within three years of becoming a full member.

You will also need to develop a set of action plans to demonstrate how you are going to meet these targets. To help, the GMI has developed some examples to use (See Appendix 4). Your action plan will need to set "SMART" objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely).

The 5 year plan below fully meets GMI requirements:

- It shows a starting point of sales of 42% of peat-free products.
- It shows documented annual targets in percentages for every year.
- It indicates the company's projections to meet full membership requirements (55% peat-free) in three years.
- It shows actual percentages alongside the targets to show that they are monitoring their progress.



GMI REQUIREMENTS

Document checklist

- ✓ Dedicated targets, linked to sales strategy
- ✓ Peat reduction procedure, dated and forming part of your company's management plans
- ✓ Full set of action plans identifying all the tasks needed to be completed over the next 12 months/3 years, approved by Senior Management

GMI Clause 2.1

The Company shall have clearly defined targets for peat reduction over the next five years. These targets are documented and show target percentage reductions at annual milestones.

GMI Clause 2.2

There shall be a clearly defined and documented Action Plan detailing how peat reduction targets will be achieved

GMI Clause 2.4

After year one there shall be documented evidence of how the Action Plan has been implemented and targets achieved

Step 4: SET UP A SYSTEM

Know who does what

Once you've set your targets and put a plan in place, you'll need to define how you will monitor and gather the information required for GMI membership. Work with your staff to develop, define and describe a system.

It doesn't matter if you run sophisticated Environmental Management Systems (EMS) or simple work flows and instruction books. What counts is ensuring you integrate the requirements for GMI membership within your everyday operations. For example, can your monthly sales reports include information about the sales of growing media and soil improvers? This will spare you the need to generate separate reports.

GMI requirements will be compatible with requirements stated in formal management systems such as ISO14001 or BS5758. You'll just need to make sure they are linked.

GMI membership also requires you to identify who is responsible for each aspect of your membership requirements.

GMI REQUIREMENTS

Document checklist

- ✓ List of key staff and roles within GMI membership
- ✓ Dedicated central file of GMI documents, signed and dated prior to submission

GMI Clause 2.7

There shall be documented evidence that key staff are aware of the Company's membership of GMI, the peat reduction objectives of the Company and the Action Plan to ensure peat reduction

Step 5: PUBLIC STATEMENT AND POLICY

State your intentions

Write a public statement that outlines to your staff, customers and interested parties your intention to reduce the volume of peat-based products you sell.

In your statement, refer to your membership of (or your intention to join) GMI and that you have set an ultimate goal of being at least 90% peat free. Display a dated copy of this statement in public – alongside point-of-sale materials, on notice boards, in membership magazines, and on your website.

Another requirement is to develop a formal peat sourcing policy – it's often the best way to communicate your requirements to your suppliers. Your policy will need to give the technical detail about how you are going to achieve your targets and aspirations, and should be in line with (or based on) the GMI Peat Sourcing Policy (see appendix 3). Business Link also offers excellent on-line resources for developing and writing environmental policies, <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/static/html/layer-1065.html>

To show you're serious, make sure your public statement and your sourcing policy is signed off at the highest level. Ideally, these documents should be dated, signed and annually reviewed so they remain current.

The GMI will also need to see evidence that your suppliers have read and signed a copy of your policy.



GMI REQUIREMENTS

Document checklist

- ✓ Signed and dated copy of your sourcing policy
- ✓ Signed public statement
- ✓ Evidence that your suppliers have signed up to your sourcing policy
- ✓ Evidence that your policy and public statement are publicly available

GMI Clause 1.1

The Company shall have a publicly available statement outlining their membership of the GMI and commitment to striving to achieve 90% peat reduction. There shall be evidence that this has been communicated to the public (e.g. on Company website and/or displayed in a prominent area within the member's premises)

GMI Clause 3.1

The Company shall have its own documented Peat Sourcing Policy that either specifies that all bagged growing medium and soil improver will be sourced from suppliers certificated to the BOPP (British Ornamental Plant Producers) Growing Media Producers Standard or that complies with the GMI Peat Sourcing Policy

Step 6: PARTNERSHIPS

Work with your suppliers

One of the main ways to reduce the percentage of peat in your products is to work with your suppliers. They can help by:

- Reducing the percentage of peat used in growing media/soil improvement products they manufacture, including own-brand mixes
- Advising you when mixes are going to be reformulated so you can update action plans
- Running trials of products on your behalf
- Promoting peat-free/low-peat products by training your staff, carrying out workshops in your garden centres or providing literature and product information
- Running seasonal promotions of peat-diluted ranges

Involve your plant suppliers too:

- Invite them to trial new growing media products and ask for their feedback
- Ask your growers about how much peat is used in the products they supply you with. This reinforces the message that you are a responsible retailer and puts pressure on their supply chain
- Send them a copy of your growing media policy/public statement so they are understand your commitments

GMI needs to see evidence of the work you are doing with your suppliers during your first annual GMI audit. In your membership application, you'll need to demonstrate what work you are planning to do with partners.



GMI REQUIREMENTS

Document checklist

- ✓ Your programme of events for the next 12 months
- ✓ Agreed plans and evidence of collaboration with suppliers, including dates visited
- ✓ Evidence of trials conducted or visited, with reports, results and photographs
- ✓ Copies of your policy signed by your suppliers confirming they will comply with your requirements

GMI Clause 2.3

The Action Plan shall include details on work with suppliers to reduce peat content

GMI Clause 3.3

The Company shall provide documentary evidence that plant suppliers have been asked to provide information on the peat content of product supplied

Anthony Hawkins, Quality Assurance Manager (Homebase) sets up a trial with Andy Haward of Trial Solutions. Here they assess the physical attributes of each mix: How does it smell? What's it like to touch? How easy is it to use?

Step 7: COMMUNICATE AND TRAIN

Bring your staff and customers on board

Your management team and staff need to know why you are putting a peat-reduction policy in place so they can confidently explain your environmental policy to customers. Crucially, they will need to understand the benefits and qualities of different mixes of growing media. As the quantity of peat used in mixes diminishes, the colour, weight, texture, even the smell changes. There will be differences in water retention, shelf life, requirements for feeding and plant rooting and your customers will need help understanding these differences.

Here are a few suggestions on how to train your staff and communicate with staff and customers:

- Explain your peat reduction plan to your staff in a briefing
- Run training and product awareness workshops
- Involve staff and customers in trials
- Publish the policy in staff booklets and information packs, including Question and Answer information sheets
- Give your staff the role of advocates, giving them the information they need to explain your policy to customers, suppliers and industry partners
- Display eye-catching posters advertising your peat-reduction policy on notice boards and information points, and crucially, at the points where growing media is sold
- Publicise your policy on your website, in gardening club magazines, and in the local press and trade magazines
- Involve local interest groups in your peat reduction work
- As outlined in previous steps, send your policy to your manufacturers, suppliers and growers

For more ideas on developing communications and training, see Business Link's website:

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/detail?itemId=1074424960&type=RESOURCES>

GMI REQUIREMENTS

Checklist of evidence required for GMI membership

- ✓ List of where you have published/ posted public statements and policies
- ✓ Evidence of communications with staff, customers and suppliers
- ✓ Copies of press releases
- ✓ Proposed training and awareness timetable and attendance records
- ✓ Workshop notes and agendas

GMI Clause 1.1

The Company shall have a publicly available statement outlining their membership of the GMI and commitment to striving to achieve 90% peat reduction.

There shall be evidence that this has been communicated to the public (e.g. on Company website and/or displayed in a prominent area within the member's premises)

GMI Clause 2.7

There shall be documented evidence that key staff are aware of the Company's membership of GMI, the peat reduction objectives of the Company and the Action Plan to ensure peat reduction

Step 8: MONITOR AND REVIEW

Monitor and review your successes

The final step is to make sure you regularly monitor how you are getting on. This will help you make sure your plans are on track, and if they're not, put contingency plans into place.

It's also good practice for your senior management to formally review your GMI membership every year. Here are a few good questions to ask:

- Is your growing media policy and public statement reviewed annually?
- Have you updated training for new starters?
- Are all key staff now aware of your peat reduction commitments? Have staff communications been effective?
- Are you tracking your peat reduction targets?
- Have you reviewed the action plans and are contingency plans in place if targets aren't met?
- Are you reviewing key roles and responsibilities regularly and/or when key staff leave the business?

To comply with GMI membership, make sure you document the reviews you conduct and include these in your annual membership submission.

GMI REQUIREMENTS

Document checklist

- ✓ Documentary evidence of your annual reviews
- ✓ Documentary evidence of your regular monitoring of peat reduction

GMI Clause 2.6

There shall be documented evidence of the monitoring of peat reduction and progress towards targets

APPENDIX 1

GMI PEAT SOURCING POLICY

To ensure that the peat used in UK growing media products causes the minimum environmental impact, the following principles must be followed:

1. Peat should only be extracted from legally-approved peatland sites that are not designated as a SSSI or are not sites of recognised ecological, archaeological or other conservation value (worldwide); this includes all areas that have been designated under the relevant national or international regulatory regime from the country from which the peat is sourced.
2. Peat is extracted only from sites with an agreed environmentally sound and socially responsible after-use plan. Planning consents may have their own specific requirements for restoration/after-use that the peat extractor has to comply with.
3. Peat is extracted only from sites operated in such a way as to protect un-worked adjacent peat areas and maintain water tables to enable them to act as refugia for peatland flora and fauna.
4. Sites are operated in such a way as to leave a sufficient layer of ombotrophic peat to facilitate the re-establishment of bog flora and fauna.
5. Peat should be sourced from named bogs to allow traceability and should not be sourced from any peat concessions opened since 2004.

APPENDIX 2

EXAMPLE PEAT USAGE REPORT FOR MANUFACTURERS TO COMPLETE



Peat Usage Report for GMI Membership, Jan to Dec 2011

Supplier:			Date:			Compiled by:	
Product line	Product	Bag size (L)	Sales 2011	% Peat	% Other	Total volume (m3)	Total Volume peat
1		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
2		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
3		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
4		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
5		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
6		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
7		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
8		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
9		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
10		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
11		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
12		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
13		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
14		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
15		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
16		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
17		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
18		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
19		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
20		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
21		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
22		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
23		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
24		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
25		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
26		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
27		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
28		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
29		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
30		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
31		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
32		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
33		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
34		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
35		0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00

Totals m3

Totals Peat as %

Totals Peat Free %

APPENDIX 3

EXAMPLE ACTION PLAN (RETAILERS)

Targets/actions	Comment	Due Date	Completion Date
<p>Target: all key staff to be aware of GMI membership and implications by 31 March 2012</p>	<p>Objectives: Organisation-wide support for GMI membership and implementation.</p> <p>Measure: Number of communications produced/meetings held.</p>		
<p>Target: all buyers to be aware of and implementing purchasing policy by 30 June 2012</p>	<p>Objective: Implementation of SGM purchasing policy.</p> <p>Measure: Number of buyers who have attended seminars.</p>		
<p>Target: plant suppliers to be aware of scheme and requirement to submit annual return on % peat per product line.</p>	<p>Objective: Awareness and implementation of policy on reducing peat used as part of plant products.</p> <p>Measure: Evidence of communication with main suppliers about requirements including pro-forma for providing information if necessary so that peat use as percentage of total growing media volume can be calculated.</p>		

APPENDIX 4

Example for a procedure for Annual peat reduction and monitoring

Action	Responsible Who does the action	Accountable Who is accountable for the action	Consulted Who needs to be involved or consulted	Informed Who needs to be aware
January-Extract annual peat data from sales system	Insert staff names	Insert staff names	Insert staff names	Insert staff names
Contact all existing suppliers of bagged growing media for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconfirmation of compliance with company's peat sourcing policy • Confirmation of which peat bogs suppliers intend to work for next harvest (if not GMI members) • Any changes to % of peat and % of non-peat ingredients within each product • Any changes to volume of bags 				
Before any new bagged growing media products purchased, obtain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of compliance with company's peat sourcing policy • Source of peat bog used in product (if not GMI members) • % of peat and type and % of non-peat ingredients • Volume of bags 				
Formally review peat volumes sold against agreed targets and report on progress				
Agree new action plans to keep targets on track				
Ensure new staff been made aware of new action plans /new staff been made aware of GMI membership				

Appendix 5

The Growing Media Initiative

The Growing Media Initiative is a scheme developed by the HTA in partnership with the Growing Media Association, DIY and Garden Centre retailers, Defra, the RSPB and the Royal Horticultural Society.

The GMI was set up to raise awareness of the need to protect the world's peatlands by reducing our use of peat for growing plants and improving the soil in gardens.

Full and Gold members of the Growing Media Initiative are entitled to use a nationally-recognised brand. This signals to consumers that the retailer is environmentally conscious and committed to reducing the level of peat used in the UK.

Benefits

The benefits of joining the scheme are:

- To demonstrate commitment to peat reduction to all stakeholders – customers, staff, NGOs, government, media etc;
- To support consumer transition to peat-free products;
- To access the accredited GMI logo to market the environmental credentials of your business and products;
- To demonstrate a voluntary and responsible industry approach, and minimise the risk of unnecessary legislation.

The GMI's principal objective is to help the UK horticultural industry meet environmental targets without disadvantaging your business. It can be done. The scheme includes major manufacturers, multiple retailers and independent garden centres.

About membership

Membership level	Eligibility	Benefits
Provisional	At least 20% peat free in the total volume of your growing media and soil improver products, with plans to increase this to 55% within three years	Recognition of your environmental commitments Promoted as a member of the GMI Annual membership certificate of the GMI scheme Evidence to customers of a clear commitment to peat reduction
Full	At least 55% peat free in the total volume of your growing media and soil improver	Promoted as a Full Member of the GMI

	products, with plans to increase this to 65% within three years	Annual Full membership certificate of the GMI scheme Evidence to customers of a clear commitment to peat reduction Full use of GMI logo
Gold	At least 90% peat free in the total volume of your growing media and soil improver products	Promoted as a Gold Member of the GMI Annual Gold membership certificate of the GMI scheme Identified as industry leader Full use of GMI logo

The GMI Application and Audit process

1. Apply for GMI membership through the HTA (see contact details below), who will also be able to provide you with details of costs.
2. The HTA will send your application and all supporting documents to the GMI's independent auditors for evaluation. The auditors may request further information or confirmation of your future plans. Upon receipt of full information, membership is usually granted within a month.
3. Once a member, you are required to submit a return at the end of each calendar year (by 28 February of the following calendar year at the latest) summarising the quantity of peat free growing media and soil improvers sold or manufactured as a proportion of total sales, together with a pack of information demonstrating compliance with the other GMI Standards
4. Each year 10% of members (an equal number of manufacturers and retailers) will be randomly selected for a supplementary on-site inspection.

GMI Certification and Logo

On successful completion of the initial audit and payment of subscription, new members will receive a certificate confirming their membership status. For existing members, certificates are issued annually after receipt of subscription and successful completion of the independent audit.

Full or Gold Members of the GMI can use the scheme's logo on own-brand bagged retail product that contain 50% or less peat by volume.



Application packs and contact details

Download an application pack from <http://www.growingmediainitiative.org.uk/>

Send your completed application to the scheme manager at:

Gary Scroby
HTA, Horticulture House
19, High Street
Theale, Reading
RG7 5AH

Tel: 0118 9303132

Email: Gary.Scroby@the-hta.org.uk

Glossary

For the sake of simplicity all products used to enrich and improve soil are referred to in this document as 'growing media'.

ADAS-UK Environmental consultants

BOPP-British Ornamental Plant Producers

DEFRA-Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

EMS –Environmental Management Systems inc ISO 14001, BS 5758

EPOS-Electronic Point of Sale

FSC-Forest Stewardship Council

GMI-Growing Media Initiative

GMA-Growing Media Association

MPC-Multi-purpose composts

RACI-(stands for Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed – a method to define roles and responsibilities)

RHS-Royal Horticultural Society

RSPB-Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

SAC-Special Area of Conservation

SSSI-Site of Special Scientific Interest

White Paper- White papers are issued by the government and lay out policy, or proposed action, on a topic of current concern