

## Which Compost – Are you using the right one?

February is the time to start thinking about sowing and planting for the coming season. The basis of good germination and healthy plant growth is quality compost – but which one? Growing media fall broadly into two basic types.

1. Soil based composts and the John Innes compost range are typical of these. The ingredients for this type of compost are:-

Loam – the main body of the compost.

Loam is soil composed mainly of sand silt and clay in the ratio 2:2:1. Loam soils feel soft/crumbly and easy to work over a wide range of moisture conditions. Loam will be sterilised to remove weed seeds and eliminate plant pathogens.

Sphagnum Peat Moss, which increases porosity and water retaining capacity.

Balanced Fertiliser, containing:

Nitrogen – for top growth

Phosphorus – for root growth

Potassium – for flowering and fruiting

Trace elements

The **John Innes** range consists of four main grades.

**Jl Seed (£4.30 per bag)** – this is a traditional mix for seed sowing and sufficient nutrient for early development.

**Jl No. 1 (£4.30 per bag)** – for pricking out/potting on young seedlings and rooted cuttings.

**Jl No. 2 (£4.30 per bag)** – used for the general potting of house plants and vegetable seedlings into medium sized pots. It contains double the amount of nutrient of jl No. 1 to suit establishing plants.

**Jl No. 3 (£4.30 per bag)** – a richer mixture for final potting of gross feeding vegetable plants and mature foliage plants in both interior and exterior containers.

**Humax Ericaceous (£4.30 per bag)** – formulated loam based lime free compost with essential plant nutrients for “lime hating” plants such as Azaleas, Heathers and Blueberries.

2. Soil free (fibrous) composts. Traditional multipurpose composts have been based on high peat content. Environmental concerns have encouraged the reduction of peat content and even the introduction of peat free multipurpose composts. Many peat reduced/peat free formulations contain recycled green waste, wood chip, wood fibre and coir. The variability in these raw materials has made it difficult to create consistent products. To get the best out of these peat reduced/peat free composts, pass them through a medium sieve to remove larger particles and add either perlite or vermiculite to improve aeration and drainage.

We currently stock two multipurpose composts:

**Humax (£5.65 per bag)** has returned to the original formulation based on 90% sphagnum peat and 10% coir.

**Westland Professional (4.55 per bag)** based on finely graded peat with added wetting agent.

The range of general purpose composts is vast, with formulations for every application (tubs and baskets/moisture control/vegetable/aquatic/citrus/orchid ....).