

Veolia and Miracle-Gro launch innovative recycling scheme for plastic compost bags in garden centres

4 years ago



A new UK recycling operation involving Veolia, garden product brand Miracle-Gro, and Dobbies Garden Centres is now set to tackle the growing problem of the 100 million bags used for compost, soil and chipped bark each year.

Developed from successful trials, the process will be the first time these low-density polyethylene (LDPE) bags will be collected and recycled into new products including garden furniture, plastic films and new bags.

In the UK, plastic films are not collected at the kerbside in most areas as the sorting and reprocessing infrastructure cannot cope with this very diverse material, and no solution has yet been demonstrated at scale for post-consumer mixed plastic films. The new service will seek to provide a new solution with a fully developed collection and recycling system for targeted post-consumer garden products that use LDPE plastic bags.

To effectively capture this material, and save 70% of CO₂ emissions associated with the production of new plastic, Veolia's service has set up collection points across 81 Dobbies garden centres, and a selection of other garden centre retailers, with the aim of recycling an estimated 40 million bags that can be diverted from landfill. The dedicated wooden recycling boxes will enable gardeners to take back their empty and clean compost plastic bags which will be collected ready for processing into new products.

This new closed loop solution is set to be scaled-up nationally to target this reusable plastic, avoid use of virgin materials, and save around 22,000 tonnes of CO₂ each year, equivalent to taking around 17,000 cars off the road.

Marcus Eyles, Horticultural Director at Dobbies, said:

“Anyone can bring in any compost packaging, no matter what brand or where it was purchased, and place it in the dedicated recycling bins. It has been so positive to see the success of the scheme, and with this expansion we are looking forward to widening access for gardeners across the UK and increasing the positive impact of the project.”

Jane Hartley, Sustainability Marketing Manager from Miracle-Gro said:

“Over the last three years we have been working to ensure that more recycled content is in our compost bags, since we recognise the importance to reduce our reliance on virgin plastic. In Miracle-Gro, the leading gardening brand, we have increased recycled content to 80% for example. However, we face a challenge that despite our best effort there is no recycling scheme in place for consumers to dispose of these single use compost bags.

“Working with Dobbies and Veolia I wanted to introduce an industry wide collection scheme where all manufacturers bags could be recycled, and in doing so reverse this trend. Consumer response has been very positive and we have found that consumers will bring several bags to the bins, with bins filling up fast. We are monitoring contamination but so far it’s good quality material. we have had interest from a number of retailers who want to set up similar schemes.”

Over the last decade Veolia has worked on key projects to advance the collection and recycling of materials and helped global manufacturers to design packaging that can be more easily recycled. This has been supported with the development and commissioning of new infrastructure to capture and recycle more materials including 433 million plastic milk bottles, 100 million coffee cups and transforming 60,000 tonnes of glass bottles and jars into home insulation.