

# PEAT



## Peat

Next time you sprinkle a bag of peat over your lawn, take a moment to sniff that rich damp smell, and think of this: your handful of peat is the result of hundred or thousands of years of accumulation of plant material. Peat forms in wet poorly aerated places where dead plant material accumulates at a faster rate than it decomposes. Since peatlands take so long to form (0.5 – 1 mm per year), peat is considered a non-renewable resource. However, extracted peatlands can be restored to natural peat accumulating systems with diverse peatland species within 15–20 years.

Peatlands in New Brunswick have been forming since the end of the last glacial period. They are generally found in a broad zone that stretches diagonally across the province from the northeast to the southwest, covering 140,000 ha. New Brunswick peatlands contain some of the highest quality sphagnum peat moss in the world. Commercial production of horticultural peat started in 1942 and has grown steadily since then. Peat extraction primarily takes place in the Acadian Peninsula and east of Miramichi, in the Baie-Sainte-Anne region. New Brunswick has numerous producers ranging from local family operations to international corporations.

Peat is an organic substance and an ideal horticultural material that provides moisture and oxygen to growing plants. Its unique porous structure enables it to absorb up to twenty times its weight in water and its fibrous texture helps to aerate clayey soils. Although peat moss does not contain many nutrients, it does adsorb nutrients added to it or that are already present in the soil, releasing them over time as plants require. This keeps valuable nutrients within the growing media, which are otherwise lost through leaching. Peat is also versatile – witness the wide range of peat products such as soil conditioners, growing mixes, moulded pots, organic granules, and seed starters.

The peat extraction season extends from mid-May to mid-September and relies on warm sunny days to lower moisture in the peatlands. On drained peat fields, peat is harrowed exposing it to the sun and wind and allowing it to dry. Once the peat is dried to about 50 % moisture content, the peat is collected by tractor-pulled vacuum harvesters. Most of this peat is compressed into bales, but over 20% of peat is processed into value-added products often by mixing with fertilizers, fish meal, perlite or vermiculite. New Brunswick primarily exports peat to the United States and Japan.

### Interesting facts:

- Jiffy Products (N.B.) Ltd. is Canada's only manufacturer of peat pellets
- New Brunswick has less than 1% of Canadian peatlands but accounts for approximately 35% of Canadian peat production
- In some countries, notably in Europe, peat is used as a fuel source
- Peat can be used for the production of oil-absorbents to clean hydrocarbon spills

