

## TAKE CARE WHEN USING PEAT-FREE COMPOST

With spring and warmer weather on the way, the gardeners amongst us will be getting busy sowing seeds and potting on plants but with the ban of peat-based compost from 2024, can I offer a word of warning when using **peat-free compost**.

A dear friend of mine from Sibford was blue-lighted to the JR last August when she developed what the doctors initially thought was pneumonia. During her 30 days stay in intensive care, 10 days of which were in a coma, she was diagnosed with **Legionella Longbeachae**. The microbiologists at the JR finally managed to ascertain the cause of her illness was from **peat-free Compost**.

The spores from the wood and sawdust in the compost, if dry, escapes into the atmosphere, letting you breath it in. All gardeners should make themselves aware of the potential dangers when working with **peat-free compost** and follow the advice in the following RHS link:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/health-and-wellbeing/minimising-health-risks-in-the-garden>

As you will see from this BBC link:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-24151700>

authorities in Australia and New Zealand have ensured that prominent warning labels are put on all compost bags sold.

This article by a Legionella Consultant published February 2024 warns of Legionella risk in compost as people return to gardening after Winter

<https://daily-focus.co.uk/2024/02/expert-issues-warning-over-legionella-in-soil-and-compost-as-people-return-to-gardening-after-winter/>

My friend's recovery is slow and she is walking a little further each day, but even with physio it is going to take up to a year to get back to full fitness. I am so thankful that she is still with us and would not want anyone else to experience this disease due to not being aware of the risks.

**So please take these simple precautions when working with peat-free compost:**

- **Wear gloves whenever handling soil and compost**
- **Do not open bags of compost or potting media with your head right over it**
- **Fold over the top of compost bags when not in use**
- **Avoid potting-up in confined spaces**
- **Moisten dry potting media before use. Also dampen down dry compost heaps before turning or use**
- **Consider wearing a dust mask when turning compost heaps and handling potting media or other dusty materials**
- **Avoid storing potting media in greenhouses as these will heat up and may encourage Legionella.**

   **Happy Gardening**   

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