PLANT POTS – A COMPARATIVE GUIDE

Pot Type	Pros	Cons
Plastic 	• made from 80%+ recycled plastic • good for plant health • durable • reusable at least 10 times • 100% recyclable • lightweight • low pot miles (made in UK)	• slow to biodegrade
Terracotta 	• excellent for plant health • medium pot miles (most made in Portugal or Italy)	• high input energy (clay fired at 1060°C for 12 to 18 hours) • fragile • heavy • hard to clean and re-use • not recyclable • does not biodegrade
Coir 	• biodegradable	• single use • not durable • contains latex (allergen) • very high pot miles (made in India)
Vipot (rice husk) 	• made from waste • biodegradable • reusable up to 5 times	• poor drainage • fragile • very high pot miles (made in China)
Fertil (wood fibre) 	• made from forest thinnings • good for plants • biodegradable • lightweight • medium pot miles (made in France)	• single use
Peat 	• good for plants • biodegradable • medium pot miles (made in Baltic countries)	• single use • made from peat

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SUSTAINABILITY SUMMARY & COST

POT Type	Embedded Energy	Degradable	Recyclable	Reusable (no of times)	Pot Miles	Cost (pence)
Plastic	very low	Yes	Yes	10+	<250	10
Terracotta	very high	No	No	5	1500	100
Coir	medium	Yes	No	0	4750	40
Vipot	medium	Yes	No	5	5000	40
Fertil Pot	low	Yes	No	0	750	15
Peat	low	Yes	No	0	1500	20

Notes:
There are no independently certified embedded energy figures, so we have given relative values. For instance, to make a plastic pot needs less than a second at 170℃ but terracotta needs 12 to 18 hours at 1060℃. Pot miles are from point of manufacture to point of use. Cost is based on a 9cm plastic pot and nearest equivalent pot in other materials.

BIODEGRADABLE / COMPOSTABLE
This is only a benefit when the material is:

- from a sustainable resource
- aerobically composted (even so, CO_2 is released)

If buried (deep compost bin or landfill) the degradation process becomes anaerobic. Methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas than CO_2, is produced. This largely negates any biodegradation benefit.

DEGRADATION OF PLASTIC
Plastic ***does*** degrade. If exposed to sunlight the process is accelerated and can take as little as 5 years. If buried, plastic can take 200 years to biodegrade.

By comparison, terracotta pottery has been found that is more than 20,000 years old.

BLACK PLASTIC CAN BE RECYCLED
It is a complete myth that black plastic cannot be recycled! For a start, most black plastic pots are made from 80% or more recycled plastic. The plastics used in plant pots can be recycled time and time again.

It is true that some black plastic cannot be detected by near infra-red optical waste sorting systems. But, what do you think is left when the other coloured plastics have been separated? Yes, the black plastic!

We use mainly Aeroplas plant pots. Since 2017, Aeroplas has included a dye that makes the black pots detectable by infra-red sorting systems.

In fact, in modern waste separation systems most plastic is shredded and then sorted by density. Colour then becomes irrelevant. Ceredigion's waste management team has confirmed that all plant pots can go into the clear recycling bag.

PLASTIC IN THE ENVIRONMENT
Plastic only gets into the environment and causes problems because humans discard it there. Careless disposal of plastic is at fault not the material itself.

Reduce plastic use, reuse plastics and recycle plastics.