

# From TRASH to Industry TREASURE

Growers, retailers and even consumers can recycle used and obsolete containers and tags to close the life cycle loop on horticultural plastics.

By Nathan Diller

In early 2009, East Jordan Plastics purchased a facility in South Haven, Mich., and dedicated it to recycling used and obsolete horticultural containers and tags. Their proprietary process allows for used containers to be turned into clean regrind that is then used to manufacture new horticultural containers — helping close the life cycle loop on plastic horticultural containers.

Horticultural containers are typically made from one of three plastic types: polystyrene with recycling code P.S. #6, polypropylene with recycling code P.P. #5, and high density polyethylene with recycling code H.D.P.E. #2. East Jordan accepts all three plastic types for recycling and will pay growers for all three material types as long as they are separated by material type and well consolidated. Material can be delivered to the South Haven facility in any quantity and it can be picked-up as well. Full truckload quantities are preferred for pick up, however LTL can be accommodated. East Jordan is currently offering pick-up service throughout the United States and into Canada.

The easiest way for growers to get started is by recycling the material that is generated within the greenhouse operation. Used plug and propagation trays, containers that did not ship to market, obsolete containers, and obsolete tags are a great way to get started. As transplanting takes place, used plug and propagation trays can be nested, stacked and re-palletized at the end of the transplanting line. Residual soil on the containers is

fine. Containers that did not ship to market and cannot be re-used can be consolidated and recycled as well. If the containers are clean enough to nest together they are clean enough to recycle.

Obsolete containers that are no longer of use and taking up space along with obsolete tags and bench cards are easy to recycle. It is best to leave the tags in their original packaging, boxed with rubber bands and/or twist ties, to prevent cross contaminating different material types.

## Reusable Methods

In addition to recycling containers that are generated within the greenhouse operation, many growers have taken recycling to the next level

and have begun collecting containers from their retail outlets. Whether your retail outlet is your own independent garden center or a large big box garden center, recycling can take place.

More and more independent garden centers are allowing their customers to return their containers for recycling. Many of these retailers allocate space for recycle bins — one for each material type, within the retail area to provide customers easy access to return their containers. Some of these garden centers also offer incentives or coupons to its customers to encourage recycling.

When consumers return used containers, the garden center employee or grower will re-use what they can and what they cannot re-use is consoli-



Retail collection cart

Below are some of the additional benefits to recycling your horticultural containers with East Jordan Plastics, Inc.

- EJP pays competitive prices for properly separated and properly condensed and wrapped material
- EJP is the end user of this material
- Prevents material from being exported
- Diverts material from the landfill
- Reduces waste removal fees
- When collection at retail is implemented, growers have the opportunity to re-use containers
- Material is used to manufacture new growing containers
- EJP keeps detailed records by customer of material recycled and will generate reports for customers at their request

To learn more about East Jordan's recycling program call their South Haven office at 269.637.3700 or visit their website at [www.eastjordanplastics.com](http://www.eastjordanplastics.com).



*Palletized plug trays*

dated for recycling. Recycling containers at the big box garden centers has been successful as well. As growers ship plants to the garden center, an empty shipping rack is left at the garden center with removable banners that encourages the consumer to return their used containers for recycling. Once the racks fill up with used containers, they are collected by the grower when delivering

fresh plants and returned to the greenhouse.

At the greenhouse these containers are sorted and consolidated. The growers can reuse many of the containers that are returned such as Shuttle Trays and flats and recycle the containers they cannot reuse. Recycling containers at the retail level has worked well for those committed. It helps increase foot traffic within the garden center, allows the grower to reuse shuttle trays and flats over and over, the growers get paid for what they recycle, and it helps divert this valuable material from the landfill. The cleaned material generated at their recycling facility in South Haven is used to manufacture new containers.


It is encouraged for growers to work together and consolidate material at central locations when it makes sense. This is beneficial for growers who do not generate large quantities of material annually because it allows for full loads of material to be picked-up at a single location which reduces the pick-up lead time and ensures that each grower gets the most value from their material. If you are considering to participate in the recycling pick-up program, here are a few key points worth remembering:

- Material must be separated by plastic type (i.e. #6, #5, #2).
- Containers must be palletized or baled.
- Tags can be left in their original packaging with bands and/or twist ties intact.
- Nesting and palletizing like containers helps segregate like materials.
- Each pallet or bale must be comprised of the same material type.
- Excess growing media must be removed from containers.
- Paper and other foreign material must be removed. Adhesive labels are OK.
- Pallet heights should be 90 to 100 inches or 48 inches for double stacking.
- Pallets should be wrapped and/or banded to secure material.
- Pallets and bales must be marked with shipper's identification.



*Palletized nursery containers*

• A full truckload of material is 26 pallet footprints stacked to 90 to 100 inches in height.

• Truckload quantities are ideal, however, less than truckload quantities can be accommodated. 

**Nathan Diller is recycling manager with East Jordan Plastics. For more information, call 269.637.3700.**

**BUBBA T. FENWICK**

He almost became the first pilot to fly the Atlantic. While Charles Lindbergh is famous for making that flight, Bubba actually had a superior plane and a five-day head start. Sadly, his attempt to boost fuel economy with a mixture of beet juice and toothache tincture caused his plane to run poorly at best. So while Lindbergh's flight took a day and a half, Bubba's sputtering journey took eight days. When he landed, the Press had little interest in what was called "the tale of a madman who smells of burnt beet juice."

*Never underestimate the value of 5 days*

**oasis®**  
GROWER SOLUTIONS

NEW OASIS® WEDGE® PLUS ROOTS YOUR POINSETTIA CUTTINGS, FIVE FULL DAYS FASTER.  
WWW.WEDGEPLUS.COM