



# Gardening turns out to be very eco un-friendly

Lawns, patios and even trees – nearly everything in your backyard comes at a carbon price

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Gardening: surely few things could be more eco-friendly? Not so, it seems. Scientists have produced new research which suggests that, far from doing their bit to save the planet, Britain's green-fingered army may be damaging it.

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The very staples of modern gardening, from mowing and watering the lawn to the use of peat and pesticides, have a harmful effect on the environment, claim experts from the University of Reading, the University of Sheffield, and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). Their paper, *The Domestic Garden: Its Contribution to Urban Green Infrastructure*, questions the widespread assumption that gardening is eco-friendly.

The findings come as eco-gardeners are already trying to change their ways. Many are abandoning petrol lawnmowers – a move that can cut 36kg of CO<sub>2</sub> every year. Lawn sprinklers can use up to 1,000 litres of water an hour – what a family of four would use in a day. Planting trees doesn't help either: they can take a decade to become "carbon neutral". Even patios have a carbon price – a paved area of 25sqm has a one ton carbon footprint. The rising trend for paving over parts of gardens also reduces natural drainage.

Garden chemicals are another problem. They are used by half of British households, but their production and use contributes "significantly to greenhouse gas emissions".

The study also blames the gardening industry for being "directly responsible for the introduction of invasive species" by importing plants that escape from gardens "with huge consequences for native biodiversity and the economics associated with eradication measures".

The widespread use of peat by gardeners is also identified as a problem. Peat dug to be used as compost in the UK releases almost half a million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> a year – the emissions of 100,000 cars. "The use of peat... is controversial due to habitat destruction and carbon emissions linked with peat extraction," says the study.

Dr Tijana Blanusa, senior horticultural scientist at the RHS and one of the authors of the report, said: "With the findings of this report in mind, the RHS will continue to work closely with gardeners, horticultural trade and horticultural researchers to minimise potential negative impacts and ensure that gardeners get the most out of their gardens without 'costing the Earth'."