

# NSW Cut Flower Industry

## Recycling Plastic Pots and Trays

### Background

Plastic plays a significant role in the cut flower industry. While the volume and type of plastic used can vary across different production systems, materials such as plastic pots, propagation trays, and buckets are commonly used throughout the supply chain.

Plastic pots and propagation trays are designed for durability and are often reused multiple times throughout the production cycle (as shown in [Figure 1](#)). However, when these items reach the end of their usable life, less than 8% of polypropylene (PP5) plastic – the main type used for these items – is being recovered and recycled.

Improving recycling rates is essential to advancing a circular economy, supporting sustainable practices and reducing plastic waste sent to landfill. Responsible management of plastic waste also helps protect the environment and minimise risks such as pollution, contamination of waterways, and harm to wildlife – particularly during extreme weather events such as flooding.

### The Waste Hierarchy

The waste hierarchy is a simple guide for using resources efficiently. It suggests that we should first try to avoid waste, then reuse or recycle materials and only dispose of materials as a last resort. This approach is in line with the NSW Government's *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2001*.

The different levels of plastic use and waste management are shown on the following page, with examples relevant to the cut flower industry ([Figure 2](#)). Pots and propagation trays are generally long lasting and can be reused extensively. While durable and reuseable, they eventually reach end of life and should be responsibly recycled to minimise environmental impact.

### → Key Messages

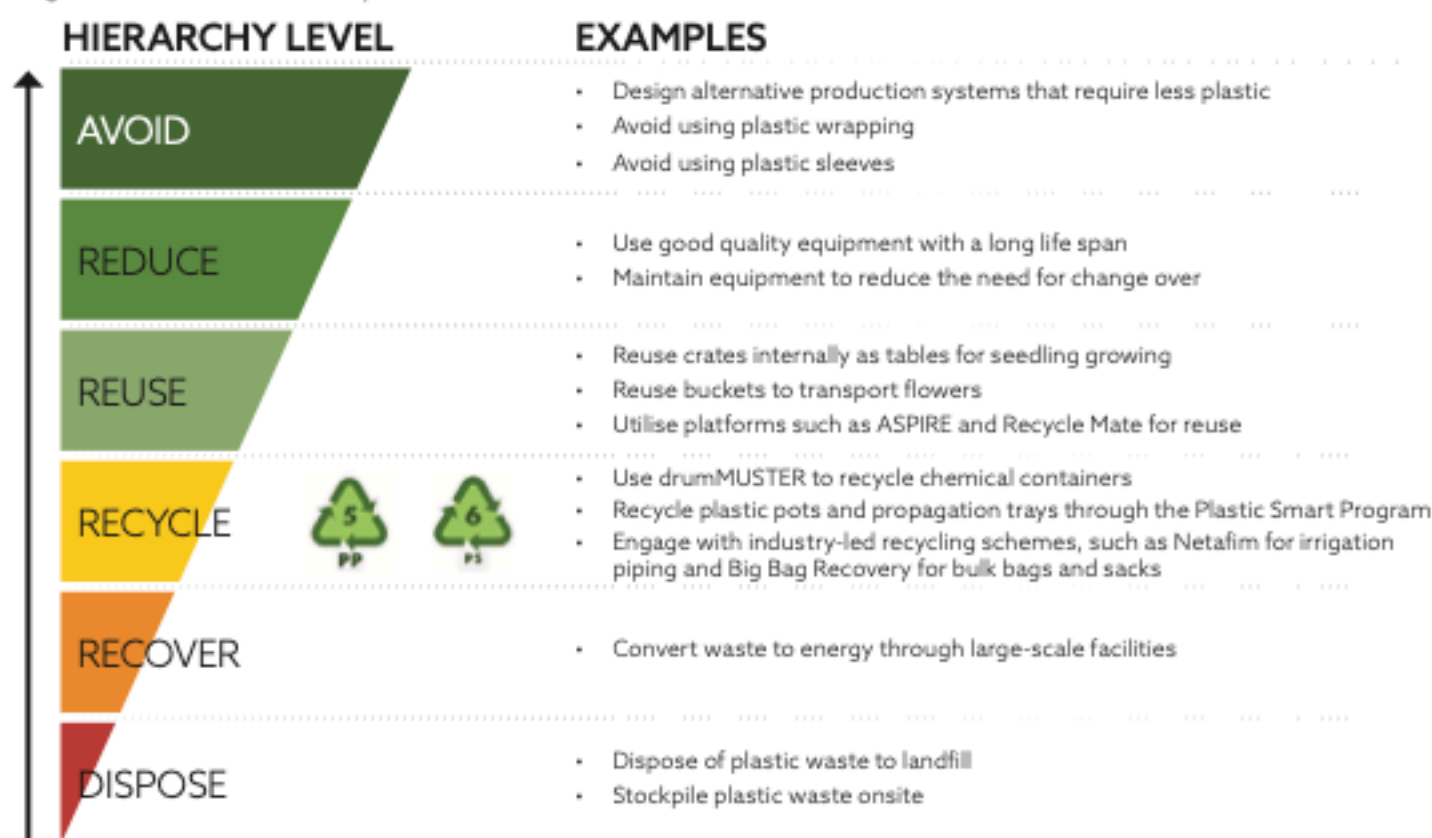
- **MOST RECYCLABLE PLASTICS AREN'T BEING RECOVERED**  
Despite PP5 plastic being 100% recyclable, most is not currently being recovered or recycled
- **REUSE BEFORE RECYCLING**  
Pots and trays are designed for long-term use and should be reused as many times as possible before recycling
- **UTILISE RECYCLING SCHEMES**  
The Plastic Smart Program helps growers recycle PP5 pots and PS6 trays through an Australia-wide network of over 700 collection sites
- **EASY PARTICIPATION STEPS**  
To participate, sort pots and trays into PP5 and PS6 categories, tap out excess media, stack pots neatly, and drop them off at your nearest collection site

Figure 1 (below). Pots and propagation trays on-farm



Images: RMCG

Figure 2. The waste hierarchy



## Plastic use across the supply chain

In the cut flower industry supply chain, bulbs or seeds are delivered and grown on farm into seedlings and then transplanted. These are then harvested, packed and delivered to flower markets to be sold to florists and other consumers.

Many producers grow flowers in pots and use trays for propagation. Cut flowers are commonly transported in black plastic buckets made from durable materials designed for long-term reuse. An overview of the types of plastic pots and trays used in the cut flower industry is provided below (Table 1).

Recognising the environmental impact of plastic in horticulture, the cut flower industry is promoting the sustainable consumption and reuse of plastic within the industry supply chain, trying to minimise waste and maximise resource utilisation.

This involves collection and sorting of plastic products, recycling and reprocessing.

Recycling schemes like the Plastic Smart Program can recycle standardised designed plastic propagation trays and pots providing a viable reuse option.



Table 1. Description of plastic pots, trays and buckets used in cut flower production

PLASTIC	DESCRIPTION	INFORMATION ON USE	PLASTIC TYPE	LIFE	END USE
<b>Pots and propagation trays</b>	Pots used for growing flowers	Some producers grow flowers in pots and also use trays for propagation. Preferred to growing bags and single use.	PP5 PS6	Pots are generally long lasting and reused extensively	Recycled or landfill
<b>Buckets</b>	Pail buckets	Cut flowers are often transported to market in black plastic buckets	PP5 (Hard, flexible, wide range of applications)	Reused and generally long lasting	Reused, recycled or landfill



### What is the Plastic Smart Program?

The Plastic Smart Program is a stewardship scheme focused on recycling of PP5 plastic pots and PS6 propagation trays. The program is delivered in partnership between Garden City Plastics, Polymer Processors and Norwood Industries - the pot manufacturer, PP recycler and pot label manufacturer.

The program collects used plastic pots and trays from multiple locations across various states and transports them to a dedicated processing facility, where they are recycled into new products. Importantly, this service is provided at no cost to industry. In 2023-24, the program successfully recycled over 700 tonnes of plastic.

In Australia, most plant pots and labels are made from PP5 plastic, which can be recycled over and over again. While the program initially focused solely on the collection of PP5 pots and labels, it has since expanded to also include recycling of PS6 propagation trays.

Recyclable products include:

- Carrier trays
- Coloured pots
- Pots
- Stakes
- Tags
- Shuttle trays
- Punnets
- Labels

### Why get involved?

Every pot, propagation tray and label recycled is ultimately returned to Garden City Plastics and manufactured into another useful horticultural product.

Together with over 100 partners and 700 collection sites, this plastic recycling program has kept more than 1 million kilograms of plastic out of landfill.

Recycling helps us to:

- Minimise pollution in waterways
- Reduce plastic accumulation in landfill
- Promote sustainable practices within the cut flower industry
- Support a circular economy for horticultural plastics.

Every recycled pot or tray helps contribute to a more sustainable cut flower industry.

### How do I participate?

To take part in the Plastic Smart Program, follow these steps:

- **Check the Pots:** Ensure pots are made from PP5 or PS6 plastic - this is usually marked with an identification code on the base.
- **Tap Out Excess Media:** Remove any remaining soil or media by tapping out the pots. Plant tags can remain in place.
- **Stack the Pots:** Neatly stack pots to maximise space - this helps fit as many as possible into a single collection cage.

If we all tap and stack our plastic pots, we assist in maximising volume per recycling collection ensuring efficiency and accuracy. When everyone plays their part, the whole industry benefits.



Figure 3. Collection site for PP5 plastic waste products

### Finding a collection site

Use the below link to find a nearby collection site:

**Find a PP5 collection site:** <https://www.pp5.com.au>

**Learn more about PS6 recycling:** <https://www.ps6.com.au>

Collection sites are located around many of Australia's major cities and towns including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Gold Coast, Hobart, Geelong and numerous other locations.

The recycling service is also available at select Bunnings stores, listed [here](#).

### Need more information?

Visit the Garden City Plastics website:

<https://gardencityplastics.com/services/closed-loop-packaging>



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Australian Government

