

Managing Plastic Crates

Background

The cut flower industry generates significant amounts of plastic waste due to the extensive use of plastic materials in growing, harvesting, and packaging processes. Plastic crates are a key component of this system, valued for their durability, load-bearing capacity, stacking stability and ease of handling.

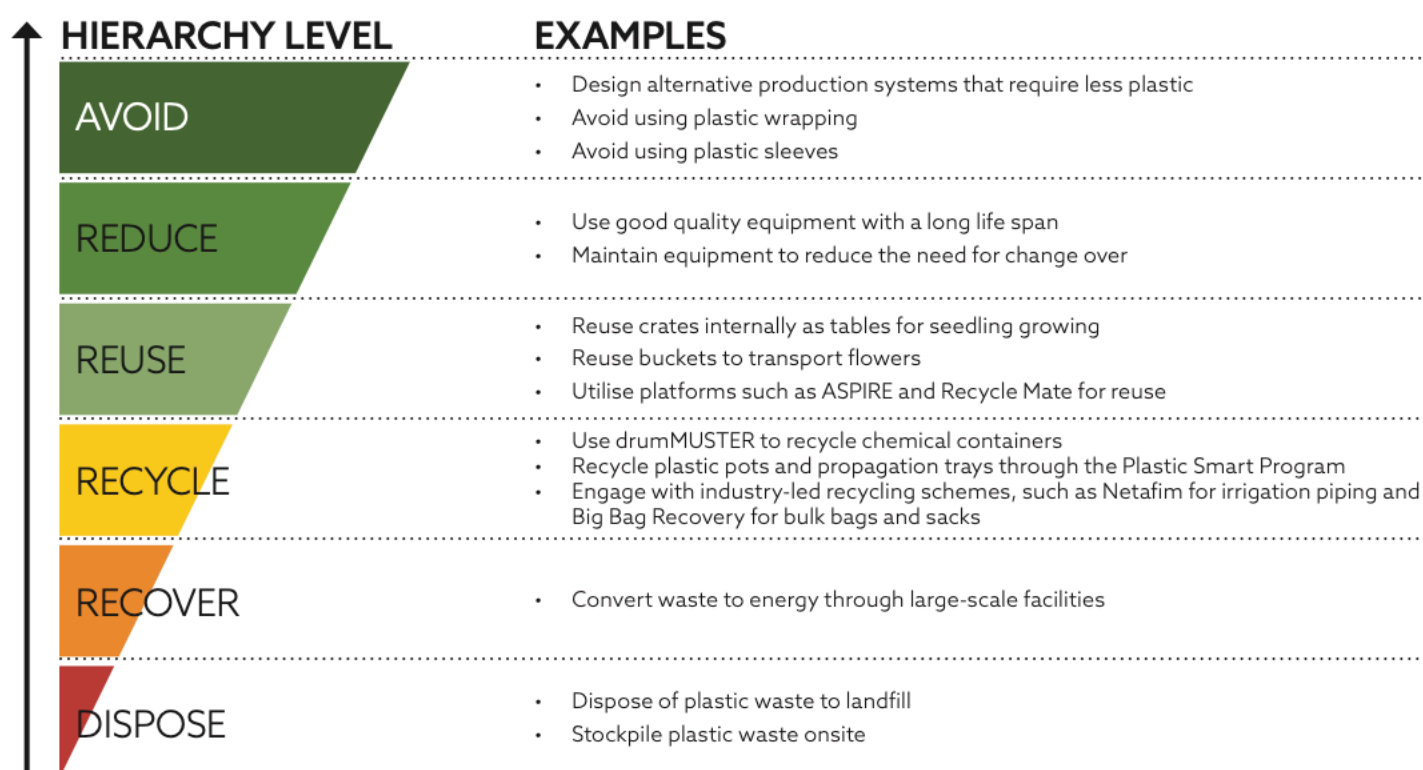
While plastic crates offer practical benefits, and can be reused extensively, reducing on-farm plastic use remains essential to supporting long-term sustainability. As plastic does not naturally degrade, implementing effective end-of-life management systems is crucial to prevent environmental harm and support a more sustainable cut flower industry.

This factsheet provides practical options for growers to manage plastic crate accumulation and waste. By adopting efficient reuse systems and exploring end-of-life solutions, growers can reduce their environmental impact while maintaining operational efficiency.

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*.

Figure 1. The waste hierarchy



→ Key Messages

● FOLLOW THE WASTE HIERARCHY

Always aim to avoid plastic waste first, reuse crates as much as possible before recycling or disposal

● PLAN PLASTIC CRATE MANAGEMENT

Without a plan, unused crates pile up and create waste – stay ahead by setting clear reuse and disposal strategies

● USE DIGITAL MARKETPLACES TO GIVE CRATES A SECOND LIFE

Platforms like ASPIRE connect growers with buyers and users, reducing landfill and promoting crate reuse



Figure 2. The stockpiling of plastic crates on farm

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Plastic crates are durable and designed for long-term use, making reuse the most effective way to manage waste. Without a plan for reuse or redistribution, stockpiles can quickly build up, leading to the accumulation of crates on-farm (see Figure 2).

To manage crate waste effectively, growers can use a combination of strategies:

- **Reuse:** Maximise the lifespan of existing crates through careful handling and storage
- **Redistribute:** Use crate hire or return services, where companies supply and collect crates after use
- **Alternative materials:** Wooden crates or other reusable options can reduce plastic dependence
- **Digital platforms:** Services like ASPIRE and Recycle Mate connect growers with buyers or recycling opportunities.

Considering and implementing these strategies can help growers prevent stockpiling and support sustainable crate management.



What is ASPIRE?

ASPIRE is a national digital marketplace that allows businesses to exchange unwanted material. Users can load items into the platform and list a price for other businesses to purchase and collect. ASPIRE allows growers to connect with nearby businesses who might need crates, reducing transportation and emission costs.

How do I participate?

- **Sign up on ASPIRE:** Visit the [ASPIRE website](#) and create an account by providing basic business details. Registration fees vary depending on company size.
- **List old crates:** Once logged in, navigate to the "List Materials" section. Provide key details about the crates such as material type, condition, quantity, dimensions/weight and price.
- **Add clear photos:** Upload high-quality pictures of the crates to provide potential buyers with an accurate representation of the product.
- **Monitor inquiries and manage sales:** After listing, interested businesses or individuals will be able to view your crates and get in touch. Check your ASPIRE account regularly for messages or inquiries. Coordinate directly with buyers to arrange the sale and organise transport.



What is Recycle Mate?

Recycle Mate is a national online platform that integrates data from various sources such as councils, recyclers, charitable organisations, and composting facilities for users to:

- Understand the legal fate of their waste
- Source items from the reuse sector
- Empower Australians to make informed waste disposal decisions.

Recycle Mate provides information on waste disposal locations to encourage more reuse and recycling practices. It also helps catalogue different bin systems for kerbside collections and formulates individual datasets for each Local Government Area providing accurate waste and recycling information aligned with contracted services.

Need more information?

Visit the ASPIRE website: <https://aspireme.com>

Visit the Recycle Mate website:
<https://recyclemate.com.au> OR **download the app**

This fact sheet has been developed by RMCG as part of a Storm and Flood Industry Recovery project to reduce chemical use in the NSW cut flower industry



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