



Midwest Groundcovers

Q&A: Horticultural Container Recycling Program

Q. Why has Midwest Groundcovers discontinued its horticultural container recycling program?

A. Of primary influence is China's "Operation National Sword," which, since early 2018, bans imports of plastics and other recycled products into its country. This is causing dramatic shifts in the balance of the world's recycling market, with changes virtually eliminating outlets for recycled materials. Combined with a reduction of the types of recyclables U.S. domestic outlets will accept due to demand on its own municipalities and facilities, it is with regret that Midwest Groundcovers suspends its recycling program.

Q. What was the purpose of the Horticultural Container Recycling Program?

A. As leaders in sustainability for 50 years, Midwest Groundcovers takes environmental stewardship very seriously. To support the environment and the horticulture industry, Midwest Groundcovers has, for many years, provided an outlet for receiving recyclable plastic containers from customers.

Q. How much recyclable product was the United States selling into China?

A. Just a few years ago, the United States was the largest exporter of recycled materials into China. In fact, through 2017 China imported two-thirds of the world's recycled plastics. But the country's sudden halt to its international purchase and flow of recyclables caused incredible effects on recycling markets around the world, including dramatic impacts to the U.S. marketplace.

Q. How does this ban affect our region?

A. There are simply not enough domestic resources to meet demand, causing a national reduction of the types of recyclable materials accepted by local municipalities and putting pressure on recycling facilities.

Q. How is Midwest Groundcovers disposing its own recyclable materials?

A. Midwest Groundcovers reuses its covering plastics through three seasons, therefore only recycling one-third of its annual usage of plastics. Midwest Groundcovers continues to recycle its pots and purchase containers from its current partner on a more limited basis due to marketplace demand, while it has identified another regional recycling-stream partnership for disposal of reused covering plastics.

Q. How long will the marketplace be challenged by China's ban?

A. The United States is facing a national need to retool how it manages its recyclables and this will not happen overnight. For its part, Midwest Groundcovers will continue to track the market and seek viable solutions for its own and the industry's plastics.

Q. Where can I get more information about the situation?

A. Below are several article links, which will help you understand the shift in the recycling industry and the many challenges facing consumers and the business marketplace.

- <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/national-sword/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/16/business/local-recycling-costs.html>
- https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/business/US-Struggles-With-What-to-Do-With-Tons-of-Recycled-Material-489971551.html?_osource=taboola-recirc
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/china-has-stopped-accepting-our-trash/584131/>

Click below to see how the China ban has affected each state, including those in the Midwest:

- <https://www.wastedive.com/news/what-chinese-import-policies-mean-for-all-50-states/510751/>

Q. Who can I contact at Midwest Groundcovers to answer specific questions about the company's recycling practices?

A. You may contact any one of the following individuals at Midwest Groundcovers:

- Christa Orum-Keller, Chairman and President, corumkeller@midwestgroundcovers.com
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Media representatives, please contact:

- Jamie Heflin, Marketing Supervisor, Midwest Groundcovers, jheflin@midwestgroundcovers.com
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