



THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK

TREASURE, SAFEGUARD & CARE FOR CREATION

Flowers & Floristry – Working Together
Towards a More Sustainable Future

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St Mark's Church, Holbrook
Knowing Christ and making Him known

ECO  **CHURCH**
AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT

Sustainable Flowers & Floristry

Inspired by a workshop by Rebekah Ellis (from Rose and Rhubarb) and thank her for allowing me to use information in her slides.

Some things regularly go into churches

- ❖ Service sheets, newsletters, books, candles
 - ❖ Bread, wine
 - ❖ Heating fuel
 - ❖ Refreshments
 - ❖ Cleaning products
 - ❖ Flowers
- We can use Fairtrade and sustainable products, care for books, avoid using disposable cups and plates, recycle and compost.
 - Let's also consider the sustainability of flowers.

Sourcing Flowers

- Until the 1970s from British farms
- Today from Holland, Columbia, Ecuador & Kenya
- Often grown heated under glass, vast amounts of water & pesticides
- Flown to flower auctions in Holland
- Flowers are not 'fresh' when they reach us
- Refrigerated storage & transport
- Sprayed with preservatives



Flower Industry Concerns

- Massive carbon footprint: heated greenhouses, refrigerated transport & storage
- Vast chemical footprint: pesticides, herbicides & preservatives, some banned in the UK, pollute soil & water, poison pollinators, impact flower workers & their communities
- Some producers are Fairtrade, many are not
- Plastic flower wrappings can be recycled at supermarkets and paper wrappings in kerbside recycling bins
- West Sussex waste is incinerated, in some other areas landfilled
- Wholesale cost of cut flowers has risen 41% since 2020

What is Floral Foam?

- Green water absorbing blocks used to create flower arrangements
- A petroleum derived plastic by-product from non-renewable sources
- Patented it in the 1950s, marketed for the floral market
- Designed to be used once, non-recyclable
- Non-compostable & non-biodegradable
- Does not dissolve in water
- Just breaks into smaller and smaller pieces of microplastic

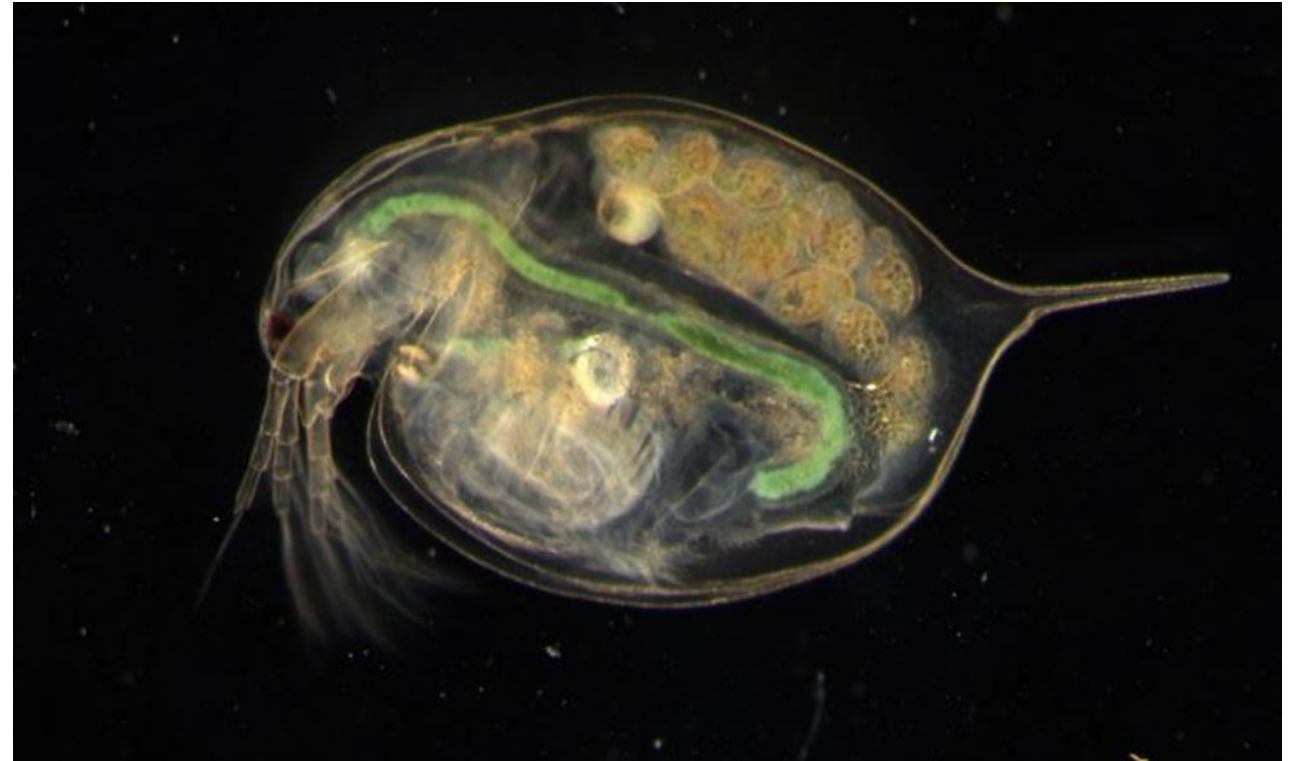


Floral Foam - Microplastic

- Made with 2 toxic chemicals - phenol & formaldehyde
- Not considered to be particularly toxic to humans in normal use
- However, very little scientific research exists into the long-term effects of floral foam
- Dust microparticles can irritate eyes, skin and respiratory tract
- Floral foam is soaked in water, green microplastic particles enter the natural environment when that water is poured down a sink, drain or onto a garden
- Floral foam left in gardens, cemeteries or mixed with green waste or compost - microplastic particles enter the natural world

Floral Foam - Research

- Research published in 2019, showed all marine & freshwater aquatic animals studied, selected floral foam as a food source
- Toxic compounds leach out of floral foam into surrounding water
- Both consuming foam & being exposed to that water, harmed the aquatic animals studied



Floral foam inside the digestive tract of a freshwater crustacean
Photo: Charlene Trestrail

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969719358218>

Bio Floral Foam - Microplastic

- A plastic foam, with “an additive that attracts microbes”
- Biodegrades within 2-3 years in ideal landfill conditions, is still microplastic
- Fragmentable, ‘biodegradable’ plastics are considered the most problematic
- Research on aquatic animals demonstrated that the “biodegradable” “Bio Foam is very similar in chemical composition to regular floral foam
- Leached more toxic compounds into water than regular foam
- Eaten by aquatic animals with a range of feeding habits and is harmful for their health

[‘Biodegradable’ plastic will soon be banned in Australia | University of Technology Sydney \(uts.edu.au\)](https://www.uts.edu.au/news/biodegradable-plastic-will-soon-be-banned-in-australia)

Disposal of Floral Foam

- Thousands of tonnes each year, much of it for funerals & weddings
- A lot ends up in church & cemetery compost heaps, estimated to take 400 to 500 years to break down
- Avoid putting floral foam in compost, gardens or natural environment
- Never crumble into soil
- Do not pour water with foam fragments down the sink, drains or onto gardens
- If possible, send to landfill bound rubbish



Disposal of Floral Foam Water

“The best practice for disposing of water containing floral foam fragments is to pour it through a tight weave fabric such as an old pillowcase to capture as many of the foam fragments as possible.

At this point in our understanding of microplastic and its impact on the natural world, best environmental practice would see this strained water poured into a hole in the ground or a garden to limit movement through the environment, but never the water system.

However, it is important to remember that those plastic fragments will remain in that hole for an indefinite period of time.”

<https://www.sustainablefloristry.org/blog-index/aboutfloralfoam>

What Are the Alternatives?

- Chicken wire scrunched up
- Moss
- Twig frameworks
- Metal pin holders
- Hide water container in front, wicker basket or other large container
- Framework of chicken wire or twigs secured with garden string
- Jugs, vases, bottles, jam jars & pots
- Baskets or pots with growing plants and/or bulbs in peat free compost



Why Change What We Do?

- Protect freshwater & marine aquatic wildlife
- Church of England's fifth Mark of Mission
- Flowers last longer in water
- Free up foam storage areas for other uses
- Save money
- Use savings on cost of foam to purchase alternative containers
- Use the rest towards increasing costs of electricity and gas

- Where does your church get flowers and foliage from?
- How much is currently spent each year on floral foam?



Summary

- Avoid putting floral foam into compost or natural environments
- Avoid pouring water containing fragments down sink, drains or gardens
- Sieve water through a tight weave fabric & pour into a hole in the ground
- Reduce or stop using floral foam
- Plant shrubs & flowers within church & cathedral grounds, gardens & allotments to use in future floral displays
- Think seasonally, use locally grown or British sustainable flowers where possible
- Avoid contaminating water and food chains



Sustainable Church Flower Movement

- 2019 royal florist, Shane Connolly, in St Peter's Church, Martley, Worcester
- Branches, grasses, flowers from hedgerow & woods decorate church in vases or buckets of water, using chicken wire to hold them stable
- Worcester Cathedral committed to reducing use of foam with aspiration to eliminate it
- 2021 Bishop Martin, the Bishop of Dudley called for sustainable church flowers

www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/bishop-calls-for-sustainable-church-flowers.php



Sustainable Church Flower Movement

- ❖ Shane Connolly, RHS Advisory Board for Cut Flowers, promotes a more thoughtful approach, ideally, everything will be compostable
- ❖ Since 2021 the RHS has banned floral foams from all its garden & horticultural shows
- ❖ Online advice, videos & support for good, sustainable, long-lasting changes

Website: <https://suschurchflowers.com/>

Instagram: [@sustainablechurchflowers](https://www.instagram.com/sustainablechurchflowers)

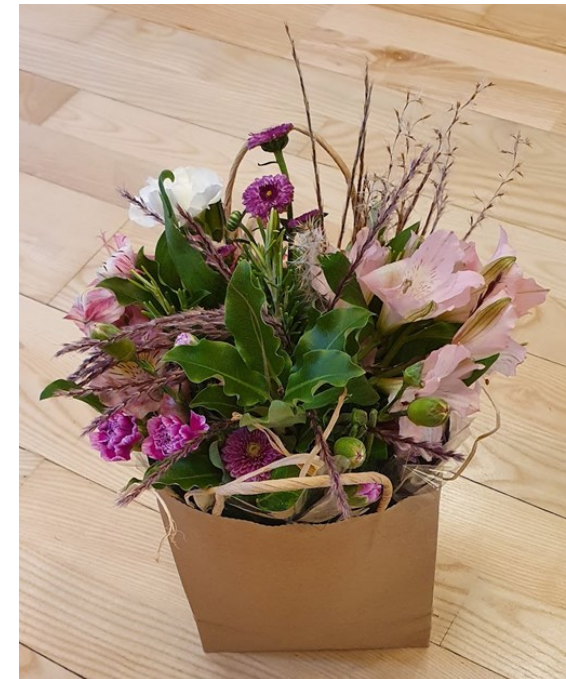
Facebook Group: ask questions, share ideas

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/964466733885149>



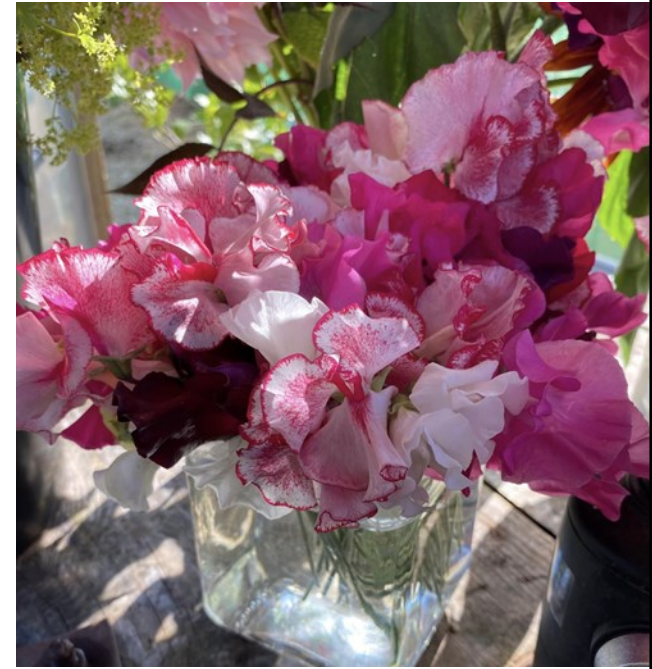
Churches - Sustainable Practice

- Consider different approaches to gather and display flowers
- Leave a bucket outside church for donations from gardens or allotments
- Talk to local shops, offer to take old or damaged bunches
- Gather flowers & foliage from churchyards, gardens & hedgerows
- Use potted plants & bulbs, reuse as gifts
- Work with local flower growers, markets, allotments, community gardeners, WI, florists, funeral directors, garden centres & others
- Loan or hire plants



How Can You Help?

- Discuss floral foam & imported flowers concerns with others
- Use the recording of this presentation
- Have fun together exploring alternatives over tea and cake
- Grow flowers and shrubs to use in future floral displays
- Save seeds and take cuttings
- Tending flowers creates a sense of wellbeing
- Flowers provide food and refuge for many bees and insects
- Work together with local growers, gardeners, florists, funeral directors and others towards a more sustainable future



Sustainable British Flowers Weblinks

- Sustainable Church Flowers <https://suschurchflowers.com>
- SCF Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/964466733885149
- Sustainable Floristry Network www.sustainablefloristry.org
- Flowers From The Farm - British www.flowersfromthefarm.co.uk
- Evolve Flowers - British www.britishflowersdirect.com
- Flowers by Clowance - Cornish www.flowersbyclowance.co.uk
- Sally's Smallholding - Horsham www.facebook.com/Sallyssmalholding
- Crosslands Flower Nursery www.facebook.com/CrosslandsFlowerNursery
Specialist of British Alstroemeria - West Sussex
- British Flowers Week www.britishflowersweek.com
- Instagram [@sustainablefloristry](#) [@nofloralfoam](#) [@roseandrhubarbflowers](#)

More Information

Church Times – the environmental impact of church flowers

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/5-august/features/features/not-mourning-oasis-glory-the-environmental-impact-of-church-flowers>

What is the environmental impact of the cut flower industry?

<https://tree-nation.com/projects/inside-tree-nation/article/5956-what-is-the-environmental-impact-of-the-cut-flower-industry>

Promote Sustainable Flowers & Floristry

- ❖ Flower industry has a massive carbon and chemical footprint
- ❖ Floral foam is a single-use, non-recyclable, non-compostable plastic
- ❖ Floral foam, including 'biodegradable' foam, has no place in sustainable flower arrangements
- ❖ Floral foam harms marine and freshwater animals



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