

# Companies market biodegradable pots to growers, retailers and consumers

By Kelli Rodda

It is not easy being green. With tons of plastic being generated into the waste stream, the green industry continues to focus on ways to be more environmentally conscious. Part of those efforts includes using and selling degradable pots. Some have been on the market for years and are enjoying a resurgence in the market, while new eco-friendly pots are trickling onto the scene.

For production use, there are pots designed strictly for utilitarian purposes to promote healthy root systems, less waste and labor savings. On the retail side, there are sleek, decorative types for value-added sales.

Here is a sample of some of the products on the market or in the pipeline.

## ECOFORMS

Sweetwater Nursery in Santa Rosa, Calif., distributes EcoForms, a line of containers made from renewable grain husks and natural binding agents. The pots are suitable for greenhouse production and retail sales.

The Grower Pots line was designed to be compatible with most commercial pot handling and watering systems, said Elise Loveday-Brown, co-owner of Sweetwater. Shuttle trays are available with the Grower Pots.

EcoForms also offer the Decor line, Novaseries

and corresponding saucers for retail sales,

Sizes range from 3 1/2 to 12 inches. Colors include sage green, province gold, charcoal black, mocha brown and natural.

The smooth finish and earthy tones give the pots a sophisticated look. These pots are not meant to be planted in the ground, but they can be tossed onto the compost pile at the end of their shelflife.

"With plastic prices on the rise, these pots are actually affordable," Loveday-Brown said.

EcoForms can be customized with barcodes,



are made from renewable grain husks and are designed to fit into traditional greenhouse production.

tag locks and embossing.

The pots last up to five years under normal use, she said.

EcoForms are rigid, so they don't have the "give" that plastic offers.

"But by using the shuttle trays, we haven't had any problems with breakage," she said.

Sweetwater trialed the pots in the greenhouse.

"They provide better insulation than plastic, so the root system develops quicker," she said. "All of our crops performed great in the pots."

Sweetwater grows organic perennials, herbs and vegetables.

◆ **For more:** Sweetwater Nursery, [www.ecoforms.com](http://www.ecoforms.com)

### CIRCLE OF LIFE

Ball Horticultural Co. offers the Circle of Life compostable pots made from rice hulls. The pots are not meant to be planted in the ground, but they break down well in the compost pile, said Jessie Atchison, industry communications manager at Ball.

The pots are available in 4-inch, 4½-inch and 6-inch and they're embossed with the Circle of Life logo.



**The Circle of Life pots are made from rice hulls and support annual and perennial plant production.**

The pots are part of Ball's Circle of Life program, which promotes sustainable growing practices such as minimal use of chemicals and the use of biologically enriched soil and organically-based fertilizers.

Some of the plants available in the Circle of Life program include the Serena angelonia series, Kong coleus series, Fusion impatiens series and 'Black Pearl' ornamental pepper.

The program is available to

growers in Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin. The program is in its second year.

◆ **For more:** Ball Horticultural Co., West Chicago, IL, [www.ballhort.com](http://www.ballhort.com)

### JUMBO ELLEPOT

The Jumbo Ellepot is a larger version of the original plug-sized pot made from degradable paper filling

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with a peat-based growing medium. In terms of size, it's the equivalent of a 4-inch round pot and fits into a 4-inch pot carrier tray, said Kei Marlin, Ellepot sales manager at th Blackmore Co. in Belleville, Mich. Blackmore distributes Ellepots Ellegaard equipment.

Jumbo Ellepots are being marketed for bump-ups in the greenhouse and for landscapers,

Greenhouse growers can cut production time on the bench by using the Jumbo Ellepots because of faster rooting times. Growers may plant Jumbo Ellepots in a 12- or 18-inch basket in March instead of



**Degradable Jumbo Ellepots can be used as "bump-ups" in the greenhouse for 12- or 113-inch baskets.**

January or February, which save on heating costs,

Landscapers can plant Jumbo Ellepots directly into the ground, which saves labor and waste.

John Klinger, manager at Lake Brantley Plant Corp. in Longwood Fla., originally thought he'd use the Jumbo Ellepots for groundcover production. But "for the fun of it," he stuck a pittosporum in an Ellepot and it grew "really well".

"The pots worked out so well throughout production that we're using them in our annual production woody transplants, perennials and groundcover," Klinger said.

Lake Brantley's landscape customers like the Ellepots because there's no pot to handle and throw out and they cut down on transplant shock, Klinger said.

"With perennial production, they root faster than the traditional soil and tray method," Klinger said. With faster rooting, he can reduce the misting the cuttings sooner, which helps minimize pathogens and fungicide use.

Mobley Plant Farm in Dacula Ga., sold both landscape and retail customers on Jumbo Ellepots, said



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owner Dennis Mobley.

"My landscape customers are seeing double the plant size three weeks after planting. One landscaper said he saves \$8,000 in labor using the Jumbo Ellepot", Mobley said.

Mobley wasn't sure how retail would react to the product, so he asked Pike Family Nurseries of Atlanta to try 3,000 flats,

"They paid me for 2,800 flats in no time," Mobley said.

Growing annuals in the Turn Ellepots takes up to 14 days bench time, he said.

"Our sales are up 40 percent this year and we had a record year this year. I relate a lot of it to the Ellepot Mobley said.

• For more: [www.blackmore.com](http://www.blackmore.com);  
[www.mobleyplantfarm.com](http://www.mobleyplantfarm.com)

### EARTH READY

Jiffy Products offers a 5-in round peat pot called the Earth Ready pot. It's made of sphagnum peat, wood fiber and lime. The pot has a shrink-wrapped top for printing plant and grower information. Bonnie Plant Farm in Union Springs, Ala., grows vegetables herbs in the Earth Ready pots. Bonnie's name and growing instructions are printed on the shrink-wrap.

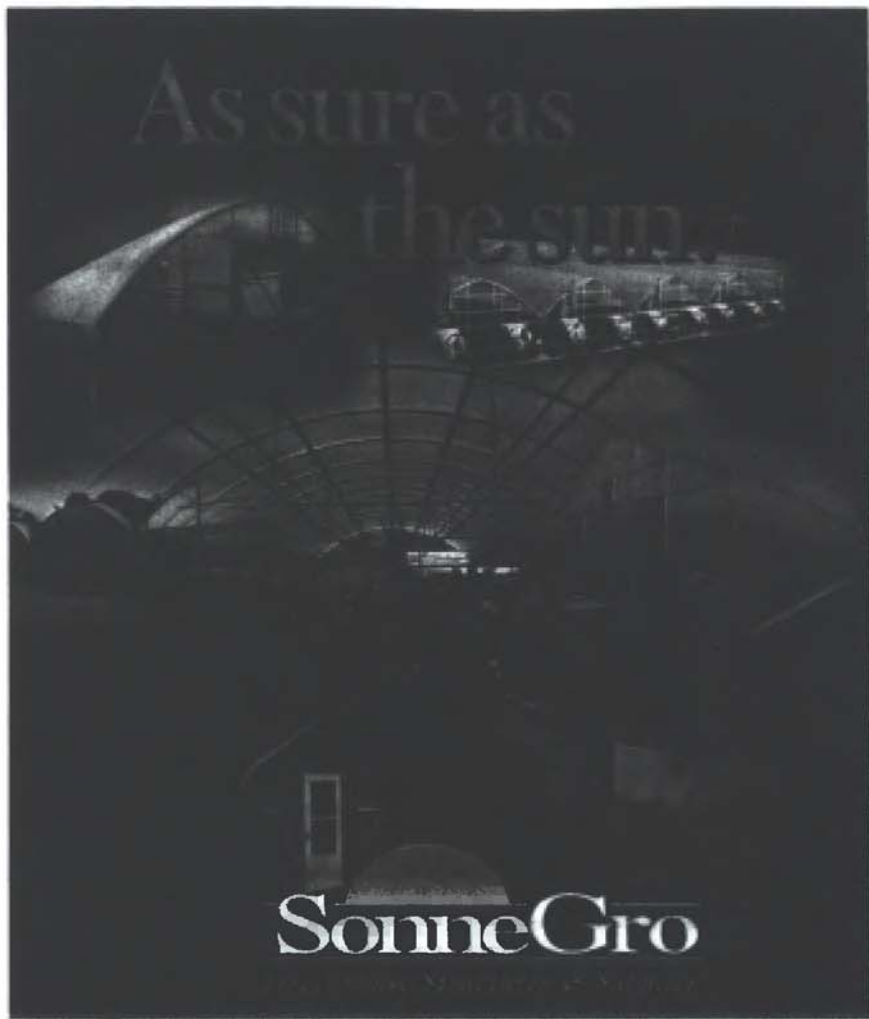
The shrink-wrap is perforated it can be easily removed before planting the pot in the ground.

Earth Ready pots feature a lip at the top for compatibility with greenhouse automation, said Roelof Drost, sales and marketing manager at Jiffy.

Any type of crop can be successfully grown in the Earth Ready pots, but shorter crops such as bedded plants and vegetables perform



Bonnie Plant Farm grows vegetables and herbs in the 5-inch peat pots from Jiffy.



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best, Drost said.

Advantages of the Earth Ready pots include no transplant shock, no pot to throw away, air pruning stimulated root development and faster establishment of finished plants, Drost said.

◆ **For more:** Jiffy Products of America, [www.jiffypot.com](http://www.jiffypot.com). *Bonnie Plant Farm*, [www.bonnieplants.com](http://www.bonnieplants.com).

## EARTHCARE

Northern Innovators in Langley, British Columbia, Canada, plans to introduce a line of biodegradable pots for the retail market next spring. The Earthcare pots are made from renewable waste including bamboo shoots, rice straw, wheat reeds and corn husks, said Jud Born, sales and marketing manager at Northern Innovators.

If discarded into the landfill or the compost pile, no trace elements



**The Earthcare organic pot breaks down in the landfill or compost pile.**

are left behind and will degrade within two years. Pots kept indoors will last eight to 10 years before decomposing, she said.

"Our industry creates a ton of plastic and that's tough to recycle," Born said. "We see this as something that could turn our industry around."

The pots have the look and feel of traditional plastic containers. Sizes range from 4-inch up to 10-inch and colors include black, sand, slate blue, Wedgwood blue, burnt red espresso, sage green and terra cotta. Shapes include classic pot, urn, square and cylinder.

The pots can be sold as a stand-alone item or complete with plants.

Northern Innovators is working on a line for production use, but those are at least a year away, Born said.

**For more:** Northern Innovators [www.northerninnovators.com](http://www.northerninnovators.com).