How biochar can be introduced to support a more eco-friendly garden

By James MacPhail of Positive Biocarbon, a leading supplier of responsibly sourced FSC biochar

Gardening continues to trend across many demographics, with more than 7 million Brits taking it up since the pandemic to help ease stress and manage their mental health.

But a more eco-conscious approach is now being favoured, as climate change concerns, water shortages, fears around the impact of pollutants, and threats of species eradication have all made us more self-aware.

These factors, coupled with a strong desire to be more active and healthier, are driving the consciousness about eco-gardening and what we want to surround ourselves with. For instance, there is now a greater understanding of the impact of products like artificial fertilisers on our environment and our health.

All of this presents both a challenge and an opportunity for garden trade suppliers like garden centres and DIY sheds to introduce new relevant products like biochar to help customers create an eco-friendlier garden.

Images courtesy of Seawater Solutions

What is biochar?

Biochar is a charcoal-like substance made through a controlled process called pyrolysis (the heating of an organic material, such as biomass, without oxygen) that converts organic biomass waste into stable soil carbon.

Biochar is something garden retailers can stock and offer to customers to help them improve soil quality and capture carbon.It is an easily accessible and usable product that can capture carbon and re-fertilise poor, low-quality soil.

For every tonne of Biochar, three tonnes of atmospheric CO2 are captured, and carbon is permanently stored when sequestered in soils or building materials.

Biochar effectively stores carbon for hundreds of years in the ground, and today is one of the most promising near-term commercially viable carbon removal approaches.

Current applications

Positive BioCarbon is already taking a collaborative approach to the use of biochar on a large scale, partnering with local authorities on initiatives to support the bid to meet net zero targets.

These include the use of biochar in soils to reduce the impact of salts, heavy oils and other pollutants that kill street trees, as well as the remediation of former industrial sites.

Biochar is also being used in public spaces to capture and store carbon in the soil. Where trees are being planted, they're being given a greater chance of survival simply by including biochar in the planting hole.

Benefits for eco-friendly gardeners

The principles behind these initiatives can easily be adopted on a smaller scale in the home garden. For instance, the creation and cultivation of communal areas to provide useable outside space for those without their own gardens is also a growing trend, which biochar can support.

Shared city gardens, areas for growing communal produce within residential developments, and tree-planting programmes all provide opportunities that benefit both the environment and our overall wellbeing.

Ultimately, the use of products like biochar within these places helps to make them more sustainable. The more of them that can be developed, the more chances a greater number of people have to achieve that sanctuary and stress relief gardening and being outside with nature can provide - a win-win for all.