

The Peat Cutter's Song

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

Dm C Dm C Dm C
I am a peat - cut - ter, it's all that I know. I'm out cut - ting peat in the

Dm A Dm C Dm C Dm
rain and the snow. We start in the mor - ning when first there is light, We work till the

C Dm A Gm Dm Gm Dm
sun goes down right out of sight, — What - ev - er the wea - ther we're out on the moss, Where there's

Gm Dm Gm B♭ Dm C Dm
nev - er a chance to es - cape from the boss. We first dig a drain — as deep as can

C Dm C Dm A Gm
be, And take off the top - soil to let the peat breathe. Then we dig up the

Dm Gm Dm Gm Dm Gm B♭
first spit and let it see sun, The sweat and the toil on - ly just has be - gun.

*Ch: I am a peat-cutter, it's all that I know.
I'm out cutting peat in the rain and the snow.*

We start in the morning when first there is light,
We work till the sun goes down right out of sight.
Whatever the weather, we're out on the moss,
Where there's never a chance to escape from the boss.
We first dig a drain as deep as can be,
And take off the top soil to let the peat breathe.
Then we dig up the first spit and let it see sun -
The sweat and the toil only just has begun.

We've spades of all kinds to turn up the peat,
But the work takes its toll on the hands and the feet.
It's fine in the Summer when there's heat in the ground,
But come Winter's chill, and there's ice all around.
Our hands may be callused and seemingly hard,
But with cuts and with keens they are painfully scarred.
For most of the year, we put up with our lot,
But we curse it in Winter when we can't hold a pot.

The land that we work on is constantly wet,
The lower we go, the wetter it gets.
Whatever the weather, we turn out for work -
It's more than our life's worth our duties to shirk.
We stack all the turfs in neat piles on the site,
The boss lets us know when we don't get it right.
And when it is ready - all flaky and dry -
We load it on carts, and wave it goodbye.

I've pains in my hands and I've pains in my feet.
My body is wrecked from the cutting of peat.
But at first light tomorrow, I'll pick up my spade -
It's back to the peat-bog to practise my trade.
Now peat is like coal which I know you all use,
But remember the cost of the fuel that you choose.
As your fire burns brightly and keeps you all warm,
Just think of me digging in the throes of a storm.



The battle to stop the commercial extraction of peat in the UK is almost won - at huge cost to the taxpayer - but dear old Ireland continues to disembowel itself. The romantic image above of the lone peat-cutter battling against the elements couldn't be further from the huge machines used to tear up peat bogs.

I know that there really isn't a good substitute for peat for gardeners - whatever the sack says - but please grit your teeth and buy peat-free compost.