

Enrich the Earth Impact Report

December 2023 – May 2025



The Ambition

Enrich the Earth Community Partnership

is a grassroots movement dedicated to preserving our natural world. By empowering local organizations to champion the benefits of composting, we aim to inspire communities to take action in reducing carbon emissions, nurturing healthy soils and protecting the environment.



Targets

The Garfield Weston Foundation provided grant funding of £80,000 over an 18 month period seeking to:

- Support 10 Community Gardens in the North East of England by enhancing the environmental performance of their activities, offering new training to users of their garden and promoting their activities.
- Provide direct support to 100 local gardeners recruited through the Community Gardens.
- Inspire gardeners in the region to reduce their reliance on peat, increase home composting and to grow more sustainably.
- Build a growing network of community organisations within the region committed to reducing the use of peat and growing more sustainably.
- Make available a locally produced sustainable alternative to peat.
- Explore the viability of using food waste as a compost and alternative to peat.
- Encourage replication through the free dissemination of key findings and the use of inspirational stories.

Impact

1. Directly supported ten Community Gardens

Community Gardens are shared spaces where people come together to cultivate plants, vegetables and flowers. They are a collective effort to grow food, beautify an area and build social connections. Gardens vary in size and design from tiny plots to larger more established spaces.

Enrich the Earth decided to deliver activities in partnership with local Community Gardens because they are embedded within the community, reach a diverse range of people, have a desire to gain new skills and provide longevity.

We have successfully worked with nine Community Gardens, unfortunately the tenth had to withdraw from the project at the last moment as it was heavily vandalised.

Within each garden we:

- Provided a wide range of different types of composting bins and supporting educational materials that enabled them to educate their visitors about the benefits of composting and the options that exist.
- Offered 'Master Composting' training delivered by Garden Organic that provided the gardens with the skills they required to improve their own composting activities and better educate visitors.
- Provided bespoke expert advice answering any questions and helping to overcome challenges.
- Arranged network meetings with other Community Gardens in the area helping to share expertise and learnings.
- Provided membership to Garden Organic enabling access to ongoing resources and advice.

This support was provided
to the following projects



Coronation Park Gardens

This is a newly established garden on land provided by the council to community groups. The plot is next to the local youth hub, and part of the plot has been developed as a dementia friendly garden. A further space has been created as the composting demonstration garden, with the wormery and HOTbin becoming the responsibility of the Youth Hub. The site has hosted training for eight volunteers as well as council staff, and the council gardening team will help in the maintenance of the site.

Cramlington has a large network of small community garden spaces, known as Cramlington Wild Hub. The group has won several Northumberland in Bloom awards, but had no composting facilities at any of the sites. There was a demand for training which is now being delivered by the volunteers at the Coronation Garden.



The Comfrey Project

The Comfrey Project offers a support service to refugees in the area, as well teaching about growing and cooking of food to groups in their locality, which is in an area of high deprivation. The garden is a place of sanctuary and is open to all visitors. The Comfrey project hosted six Master Composting training courses and have welcomed eight groups from other community gardens, to share their experiences of community gardening.

They have become our experts on using the HOTbin, and offer support to new HOTbin users, within Community Gardens.

“We didn’t realise how much food waste we produced, especially on events, but have managed to prevent all food waste going to landfill for the last two months. We even tested paper plates and wooden cutlery, which all composted beautifully fast in the hotbin. We are thinking about getting another”.

- The Comfrey Project



The Meadows

This is a well established garden with huge links to the local community and a strong sustainability ethos. It is open to the public, uses the food from its site to provide meals for the community and is committed to environmental education for the local populace. Bins are in the process of being installed along with signage and staff and volunteers are booked for a Master Composting course on 17th June.

We have now installed eight composting demonstration sites with two more under development. Bins and signage are installed in all eight sites, but it takes time for compost to develop so the newest two sites will not be operational until summer 2025.

Scotswood Community Garden

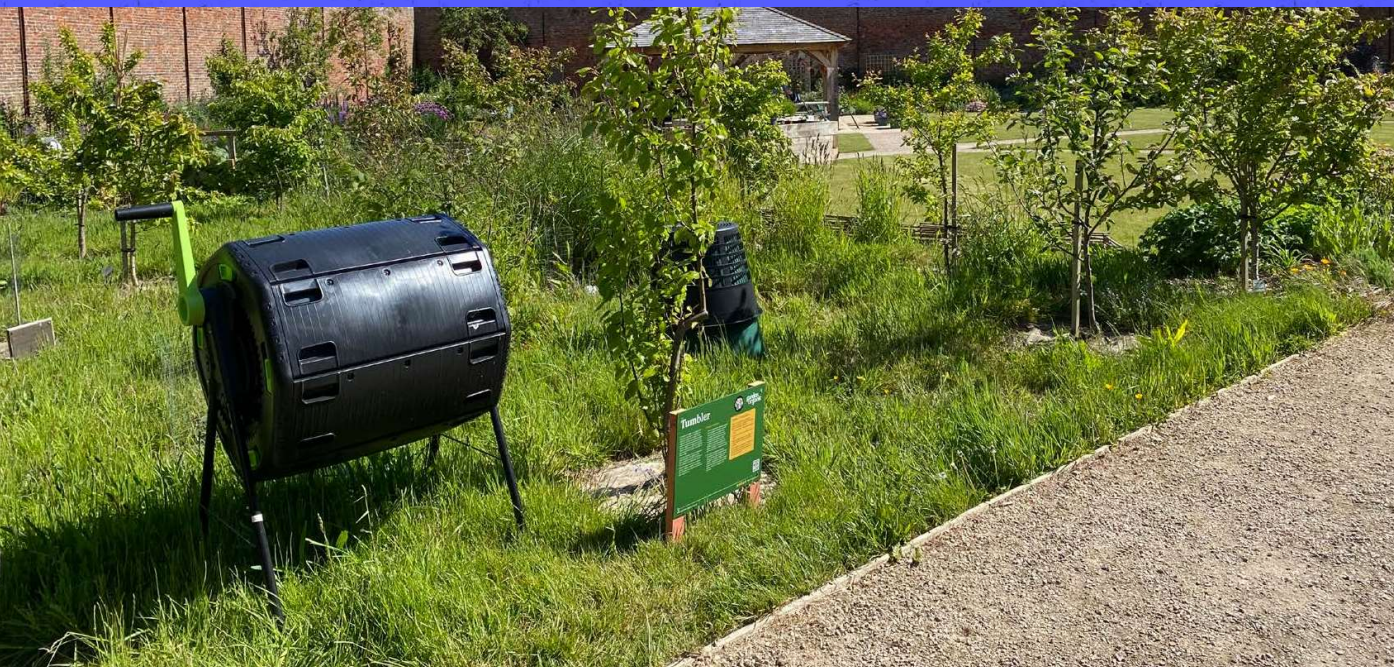
A long established garden in an area of high deprivation. They offer training and work experience to a large range of service users, such as refugees, Mental health support teams, school support services, children outside of education, elder persons groups and adults with extra learning needs. Scotswood Garden works with local food banks and is hosting composting and food waste training with several of these groups.



Newbiggen by the Sea Community Garden

This site is currently managed by Groundwork who are in the process of passing it over to a local community management group. Newbiggen by the Sea is in an area of high deprivation, and a community consultation two years ago showed that the community was missing the Allotment Culture that used to prevail in the area. The site is at the rear of the local sports facility and community hub, has some newly built raised beds and a shed large enough to hold meetings.

The demonstration compost bins are dotted around the site with signage and are used as a training tool for new gardeners. The site hosted five Master Composter sessions over three days last year, which included participants representing local gardeners, schools, youth workers and mental health support groups as well as Groundwork staff. It was an excellent networking event and facilitated partnerships between several of the groups.



Cresswell Walled Garden

The site is a Community Interest Company which was developed to restore and maintain an ancient Pele Tower and Walled Garden in a coastal village in Northumberland. It is open to the general public and receives many visitors during the summer months. It is open all year round and has a team of volunteers, 11 of whom have completed Master Composting Training. The site hosts visits by local schools and community organisations, and is offering compost training sessions to visitors.



Crook Hall Gardens

A beautiful walled garden managed by the National Trust. The site now has a dedicated composting area with seating and signage and 20 of the site volunteers have attended Master Composter training and are available to talk to visitors to the site to explain the different composting bins. Crook Hall has hosted seven Master Composting training courses for other groups, and facilitated visits from community gardens.

Shildon Alive Community Garden

Shildon Alive is an organisation that provide food and support services to their local community, which is in the top ten percent of areas of deprivation in the UK. Enrich the Earth introduced the Rural Development Centre to Shildon Alive and RDC have now provided funding and support services to help Shildon Alive develop their new building, and funded repairs to the community garden including building a new education shed and restoring fencing. We have now installed a compost demonstration site at the garden, three members of the team have completed Master Composter training and the team at the kitchen are getting to grips with HOTbin composting.



**Two further sites, located in
Sunderland and Darlington are
currently under development**



2. Directly support 100 gardeners recruited through the Community Gardens

Enrich the Earth partnered with the charity Garden Organic to deliver their 'Master Composter' training in the region. These training courses have been running since 2001 and provide volunteers with the skills, confidence and ability to promote home composting in their locality by encouraging householders to take-up composting.

The charity has estimated that each home compost bin saves 150 kg of waste from having to be transported away, and instead turns it into a great free product that benefits the environment, the soil and growing.

Each training event consists of:

- A virtual compost bin game.
- Reasons to compost.
- The composting process.
- How to spread the compost message.
- How to choose a compost bin.

In total 124 volunteers have or will be trained as Master Composters in the locality.

Community Garden	Volunteers trained
Comfrey Project	18
Cramlington Garden Hub	11
Creswell Walled Gardens	5
Crook Hall Gardens	25
Go Local	2
Meadow Well Community Garden	7 (yet to be trained but course booked)
Newbiggen Community Gardens	23
Scotswood Garden	8 (6 of whom yet to be trained but course booked)
St Margarets Allotments	18
Newcastle Food Bank	7 (yet to be trained but course booked)
Total	124

"There was a broad spectrum of topics which were very well explained with an expert trainer who was very knowledgeable".

- Composter training attendee

"Lots of info which generated really interesting and useful group discussions. Really well facilitated. Great resources! More info on low budget composting solutions".

- Composter training attendee

Brilliant teaching, with such enthusiasm and commitment. Thank you very much again for your time and effort. Greatly appreciated.

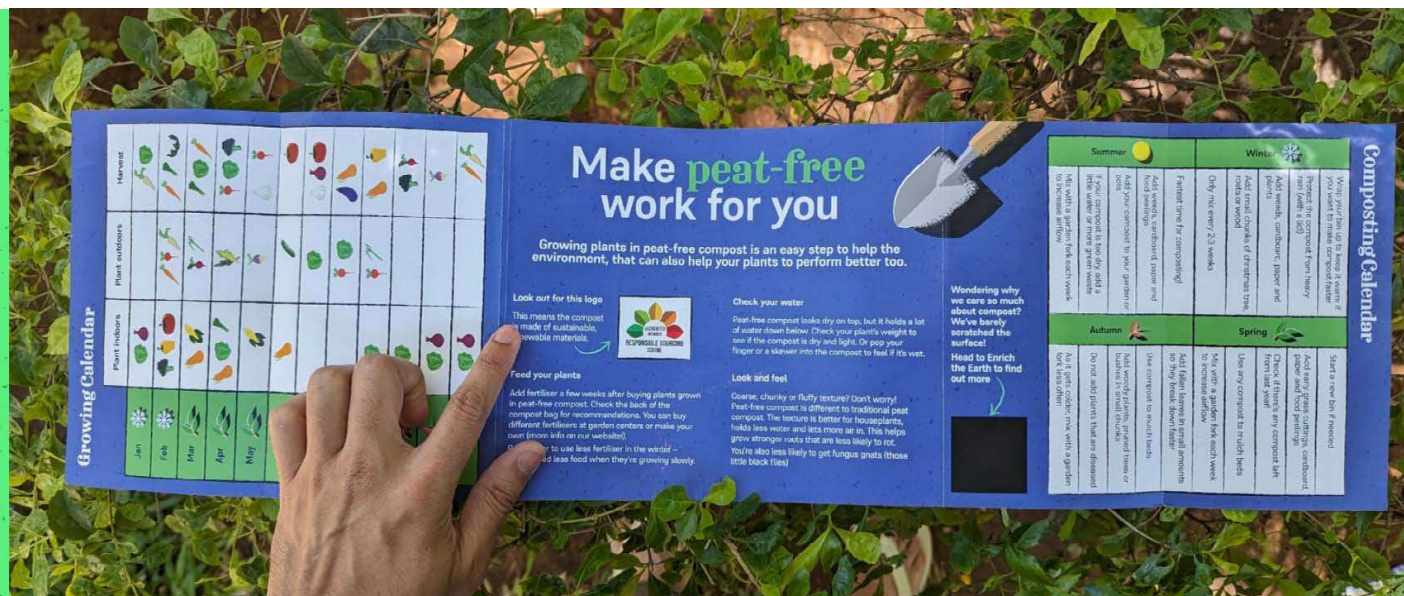
- Composter training attendee

3. Inspired gardeners to consider composting and reduce their use of peat

To support the launch [videos](#) explained the aim of the project and showcased local partners. These have proved invaluable in reaching people and starting discussions on composting and growing peat-free.

Point of Sales materials were created offering guidance on how to choose the perfect 'SoilMate' alongside a gardening calendar, tips on using peat-free compost and links to the Enrich the Earth website. Over 1,000 of these were distributed at three garden centres in the trial area.

Stores saw a minimal reduction in the sales of peat-based growing medium and a slight increase in the sales of peat-free growing medium. This is a trend witnessed across the sector and it is difficult to attribute causality to the POS interventions; particularly without any primary research.



↑ Sales of **peat-free compost** at Halls of Heddon increased between 2023 and 2024 from 68,500 bags to 77,826 bags - **an increase of 14%**

↓ Sales of **peat based compost** at Halls of Heddon decreased during the trial period between 2023 and 2024 from 193,932 bags to 185,144 bags - **a decrease of 5%**



Building on the learnings from the initial trial, it was concluded that a more collaborative approach involving organisations from a range of sectors was required to reach more people. Enrich the Earth brought together a partnership of 21 organisations including DEFRA, charities, trade bodies, retailers and manufacturers.

This partnership created freely available leaflets and social media content designed to help people to better choose and use peat free compost. As part of the initiative the Royal Horticultural Society launched a free advisory email service to answer specific questions.

The new materials were launched at a major gardening event in February 2025. This launch secured 28 items of editorial coverage with three more to come, saw 15,000 leaflets distributed and succeeded in getting a wide range of stakeholders to use the content created.

Encouragingly, the stakeholder group has agreed to continue and the materials will be further refined and enhanced in time for the next growing season.

Full details of the coverage secured are here and access to the freely created materials can be found here.



➡ The launch was endorsed by a range of organisations

“It is a really positive step to have come together with so many organisations to help provide these top tips for gardeners, to make sure they can grow successfully peat-free.”

- Professor Alistair Griffiths,
RHS Director of Science and Collections

“This kind of collaboration across the horticulture sector is key to protecting our peatlands for the future. Gardeners are keen to do their bit to preserve our wonderful landscapes and this new guidance will help to bridge the knowledge gap and make peat free gardening achievable.”

- Nature Minister, Mary Creagh

“By working collaboratively with retailers, manufacturers, NGOs, and industry bodies, we can help ensure that gardeners receive the guidance they need to select and use peat-free products effectively.”

- Andy Smith at The Responsible Sourcing Scheme

4. Made available a locally produced sustainable peat alternative

Enrich the Earth successfully developed a peat-free growing medium, derived from 30% green waste collected at the Joint Stocks Composting site in Durham, proving that it is possible to create a value-chain out of household garden waste and produce a viable peat-free product. Overall, Enrich the Earth produced 6000 litres of material which has all been tested and used successfully by growers.



“We see a move from having a ‘soil improver’ to having a viable product as a good outcome...if this model was replicated..., we could move away from reliance on peat-based products”

- Victoria Burrell, Waste Strategy Team, Durham County Council

Enrich the Earth tested their peat-free growing medium with two growers and in a scientific environment, producing high quality plants and proving that it is possible to use peat-free growing media containing a high proportion of quality green compost in a commercial setting. The growing trials were largely a success, producing plants which outperformed current market peat-free products and the peat based control growing mediums - even when tested on plants which are known to be challenging such as Dahlias and Hebes. Overall, consistency in terms of retailability, was felt to be better than the peat based control plants, showing more uniformity.

Halls of Heddon reported their Hebes and Dahlias grew better in the peat free mix - growing more robust and aesthetic plants. On initial inspection of the Dahlia cuttings, Halls of Heddon reported that the peat-based growing medium was showing faster growth (by around 50%). However, at the close of the trial there was no notable difference in size between the peat and peat-free grown samples.

“At harvest, it was impossible to tell the difference between the Enrich the Earth Compost grown plants and peat-based....It did produce really good quality plants, even in the Dahlias, which can be quite fussy”.

- David Hall, Owner, Halls of Heddon

GoLocal food had excellent success with the peat free growing media – they reported that the mix performed much better than products they had used before (both peat and peat free). Seedlings were healthy and strong and able to be transplanted in to the field to grow and produce food. Lettuce, tomatoes, kale, peppers, cauliflower, broccoli and sprouts all grew well and outperformed a leading competitor peat free growing media.

The successful trials resulted in the creation of a new social enterprise called [Treasure Gardening](#). With investment from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation the first product available is the peat-free growing medium created by the trial which is branded as Wonderfuel. This is available for sale at the Halls of Heddon and Tyne Valley Garden Centre. Profits generated by sales of the product will be used to support community gardens providing them with a much needed additional source of income.

“There’s a lot of scepticism about green waste in compost. So it took a leap of faith, it was a bit scary.... But it does work and I can prove it works because we’ve grown successfully in it.”

- David Hall, Owner, Halls of Heddon

5. Undertaken a food waste feasibility study in Newcastle

Enrich the Earth commissioned a feasibility study assessing the viability of establishing a social enterprise composting facility for locally-sourced food waste in Newcastle. The study involved: interviewing industry experts (on legislation and composting operations), researching the legislation and relevant information and undertaking two site visits, one to businesses in Newcastle and one to a composting facility in Paris that was thought to operate as a social enterprise ([Les Alchimistes](#)).

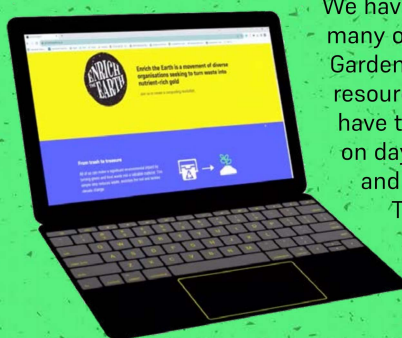
Legislation for separate food waste collections and the proposed banning of peat extraction for growing media will firstly, create a strong demand for separate food waste collections and generate a high demand for peat-free growing media products. One might expect that these combined impacts will be a strong driver for collection and composting of food waste.

However, government policies continue to support the sending of food waste to anaerobic digestion in preference to composting. This priority means that it is currently not financially viable to establish a social enterprise within Newcastle and this will only be possible with legislative changes.

6. Built a growing network of supporting community organisations

The Master Compost training courses have brought different Community Gardeners together helping to create more shared learning and connections. This has been particularly beneficial for the newer or less established gardens as they have been able to understand what is possible from those that have been running for longer and have more resources.

To help support the network we have sent our regular Enrich the Earth bulletins sharing our thoughts, experiences and latest news.



We have discovered that many of the Community Gardens have limited resources meaning they have to concentrate on day-to-day activities and fundraising. This severely limits their capacity for networking.



Learnings

Our key learnings from the project are:

1

Community Gardens are highly valuable but under-resourced assets for local communities. They provide a social space where people can meet, learn new skills, connect with nature and grow food. The physical space they provide enables them to reach all sectors of society increasing community coherence.

2

The impact that Community Gardens could deliver is not fully utilised due to a lack of financial resources hindering their ability to create sustainable long-term plans.

3

There is a significant desire amongst Community Gardens to enhance their environmental credentials by increasing composting and being peat-free. Enrich the Earth helped to meet this demand which was only possible because additional resources were made available.



4

Community Gardens provided a significant opportunity enabling local residents to understand the importance of moving from peat-based products. This was reinforced with communications from garden retailers. The initial impact of this wider communications campaign was initially limited but improved significantly when a collaborative approach was taken.

5

There are opportunities to help move from peat-based composts by using more local green waste. The project proved that this was possible but requires the full involvement of the local authority plus compost manufacturers.

6

Other countries have demonstrated that it is feasible to create social enterprises that collect food waste from organisations and turn it into compost for sale locally. The economics for this currently don't work in the UK and will require a change of government legislation to make it feasible.

7

There is a desire amongst Community Gardens to learn more from each other and share resources, but this is hindered due to limited funding.



➤ Further Information

For further information visit [Enrich the Earth's website](https://www.enrichtheearth.org.uk) or email trewin@sizzle.org.uk.