



# **CULTIVATING THE COMPOST REVOLUTION**



**A manifesto of change**

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**Enrich the Earth is a new movement of organisations calling for the UK to radically rethink how we handle the 14 million tonnes of green and food waste produced every year by households.**

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**Our mission is to convert one million tonnes of waste annually into valuable nutrient-rich compost – that's equivalent to 40,000 full rubbish trucks. This would save money, enrich the soil, cut carbon emissions and protect nature.**

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# WHY WE NEED TO ACT

## Why we need to act

The government is proposing new legislation to cut waste and meet environmental targets. It is likely that all local authorities in the UK will be required to establish separate household food waste collections. At the same time, government is proposing to ban the sale of bagged peat to English amateur gardeners and ultimately seeks to stop the use of peat in horticulture.

### New food waste collections

New local authority food waste collections will create an estimated additional 2 million tonnes of food waste that will have to be collected and treated.

All organic waste (such as green and food waste) is heavy and of low value. Transporting it long distances is costly with a high environmental impact. The most sustainable way to deal with this waste is:

- To reduce the amount that needs to be handled by the local authority through increased composting.
- To ensure the collected organic waste is not contaminated with other materials such as plastic and non-compostables.
- To process the material as locally as possible to keep financial and environmental costs to a minimum.
- To get the highest value possible from the material by increasing its quality and consistency, allowing for greater use in the horticulture industry.

### Banning peat in horticulture

Lowland peat bogs are important carbon sinks and are a place of unique biodiversity which is why government is keen to stop peat being used in horticulture. If the peat ban is implemented, the horticultural sector will have to replace the 950,000 cubic metres of peat currently used every year by the industry. To achieve this:

- Gardeners and growers will have to learn how best to use alternative materials which will not act in the same way as peat.
- The industry will need to find a range of different materials which are more sustainable, affordable and equally effective as a growing media.
- One of the replacement materials could be organic waste which might be able to replace up to 30% of the peat used.

The introduction of new legislation could lead to significant environmental benefits and drive a more circular economy, but only if radical new action is taken from citizens to businesses. Enrich the Earth's ambition is to highlight what new steps are needed and to showcase innovative solutions.

# THE SYSTEMIC CHANGE NEEDED

## The systemic change needed

Green and food waste account for over a third of the weight of rubbish collected from UK households. According to WRAP there are 6.6 million tonnes of food waste created every year. Figures for household green waste are harder to discover, but a 2020 University of Southampton report assessing households in Hampshire suggested that an average home generates 288kg per year of green waste which when extrapolated across the UK equates to 8.12 million tonnes. 70% of these materials are collected by local authorities.

This 14 million tonnes of waste is considerably greater than other items, such as plastic packaging, but has not generated the same level of public debate or political intervention. Enrich the Earth believes now is the time to create a more strategic approach to handle this material based upon the following five principles:

- 1** The priority for using organic waste derived products should be to improve soil quality both in horticulture and agriculture.
- 2** Materials need to be used as locally as possible to minimise financial and environmental costs.
- 3** Every effort needs to be made to reduce contamination in waste materials to get the maximum value from the organic waste.
- 4** A legislative framework needs to be established that supports the more sustainable use of organic waste in horticulture and agriculture.
- 5** Greater cross-sector collaboration is required to deliver rapid change at scale.

This strategic approach is required to avoid unintended negative financial and environmental consequences when new legislation is introduced. For instance, building the estimated additional 50-100 Anaerobic Digestors required to handle the additional 2 million tonnes of food waste that will be collected annually will require careful consideration to ensure they are located near the populated areas and are acceptable to local communities.

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# CHANGE IS REQUIRED AT ALL LEVELS

## Change is required at all levels

To deliver the change everybody needs to do their bit including:

- Individuals including households and gardeners.
- Commercial bodies including horticultural retailers, professional growers, companies and the waste sector.
- Public bodies including central government and local authorities.

### Individuals

#### Households

All households can play their part by ensuring that only organic materials go into their garden and food waste. Other materials such as plastic are costly to remove and reduce the potential for the materials to be used for growing.

#### Gardeners

Get composting. The biggest difference gardeners can make is to create their own compost from green and unavoidable food waste. Increasing the number of people who compost from the current estimated level of 33% to 50% would annually remove 1,000,000 tonnes of waste that would need to be collected by local authorities. Home composting would save money, enrich the soil and deliver environmental benefits.

#### Community Groups

Community groups can play a crucial role in the transition by:

- Establishing composting sites in community gardens and allotments.
- Spreading the message to all sections of the community particularly those not traditionally reached by environmental messages.
- Backing campaigns that create a more supportive legislative framework.
- Promoting the campaign in their locality.

## Commercial Bodies

### Waste Management Companies

The waste sector can play a central role in transforming how the UK handles organic waste by:

- Supporting campaigns that promote composting at home.
- Developing behaviour change initiatives to reduce contamination in green and food waste and sharing results for others to replicate successful approaches.
- Committing to minimising the environmental impact of handling organic waste by creating local solutions that get the most value from the collected material.

### Horticultural Retailers

Retailers can play a significant role by:

- Committing to phasing out peat from their retail offering as rapidly as is feasible.
- Helping gardeners make more informed decisions on the perfect soil-mate for their needs.
- Promoting the importance and benefits of home composting at point-of-sale and in canteens.

### Professional Growers

Professional growers will need to transition as quickly as possible from peat without jeopardising their business. This can be done by:

- Making a public commitment to move from peat to more sustainable alternatives.
- Trial commercial horticulture peat-free formulations early to find the most suitable alternatives.
- Learning from those that are already successfully growing peat free.
- Participating in knowledge sharing initiatives with other growers.

### Companies

Companies can play their part by:

- Committing to going peat free in their grounds, with infrastructure development projects and through supply chains.
- Implementing on-site composting for their organic waste.
- Promoting the importance of composting and reducing waste contamination to their employees as part of their wider sustainability commitments.

## Public Bodies

### Government

Governments can support the transition by:

- Creating legislative time to turn the ambition of phasing out peat in horticulture into a legal requirement.
- Ensuring that policy promotes using organic waste as locally as is feasible.
- Ensuring that there are no financial or procedural impediments preventing the greater use of organic waste in horticulture and agriculture.
- Promoting the benefits of turning organic waste into a nutrient rich product by sharing industry best practice.
- Providing research and development funding.

### Local Authorities

Local authorities can play a crucial role by:

- Promoting the benefits of home composting.
- Running behaviour change campaigns to reduce levels of contamination in garden and food waste.
- Maximising the value of the green and food waste they collect by refining the way these materials are processed and marketed.

# **TURNING WORDS INTO ACTION**

**Enrich the Earth is seeking to turn these manifesto ambitions into reality by working in partnership with a range of organisations, with a localised campaign in the North East of England. The results will be independently assessed and openly shared.**

**If you wish to get involved, please get in touch via [hello@sizzle.org.uk](mailto:hello@sizzle.org.uk)**

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