



Shovel-it Yourself Day, Lowestoft

12 May 2023



To mark [Compost Awareness Week 2023](#), residents were invited to bring a bag and a shovel and help themselves to free soil improver at this Shovel it Yourself event organised by East Suffolk Council with the support of a Community Payback team from the [East of England Probation Service](#) and the [Suffolk Waste Partnership](#). 10 tonnes of soil improver were donated by ESC's garden waste contractor, Biogen (UK) Ltd.

It was held in the staff car park of Waterlane Leisure Centre, which is operated by [Everyone Active](#), who provided the team with hot drinks and with toilet and hand washing facilities on the day.

It was promoted via a [press release](#) issued by ESC on 27 April and a [flyer](#) produced by the Greenprint Forum. Posts were circulated on social media by the Greenprint Forum and by East Suffolk Council, and some of the visitors told us they had found out about the event via these posts having been shared on local gardeners' groups online. Everyone Active displayed the poster in the leisure centre. It was also promoted by Suffolk Recycling as part of their [webpage](#) to promote local activities and initiatives during Compost Awareness Week.

The press release urged those who were to do so to walk to the event and fill their wheelbarrow, to help cut the number of vehicle journeys, and whilst most people did turn up with the car or van we did have a few local residents and many of allotmenters turn up with their wheelbarrows, some making repeat visits on foot. The venue was adjacent to the community allotment gardens on St Margarets Road, facilitating access to the free product by holders of allotments there.



The response from the local community was overwhelmingly positive. Even though the event was held on a wet and windy day with torrential rain at times this did not put off the keen gardeners and growers of Lowestoft, with approximately 100 people visiting to take some of the product with many making repeat visits. We also received expressions of interest from visiting teachers enquiring about having the product delivered to their schools. Only about a tonne or so was left by the close of the event and all of this remainder was cleared over the weekend.

The soil improver was made from the garden waste that residents of the district place in their domestic green waste bins, thus closing the loop.

Biogen process our garden waste via [open windrow composting](#) at their site at Lackford in west Suffolk. This process is essentially like a giant garden compost heap, where the material is able to compost naturally in the presence of oxygen – an aerobic process resulting in a compost product that meets the industry standards for compost [BSI PAS 100](#), certified by the [British Standards Institute](#). As the process takes place in the open, it is not licenced to accept any food wastes or animal by products. The usual end destination for the majority of the end product that Biogen produce from our garden waste is for local agricultural and landscaping use.



As well as being an ideal opportunity to say thank you to residents for recycling, in the form of free soil improver, the event also presented us with an opportunity to engage with residents on the topic of composting and in particular promote home composting, which is after all the most environmentally sustainable way of dealing with compostable waste as it all takes place at source without any need for transportation – with the added bonus to the gardener that they know exactly what went in.

Many of those who visited expressed a wish to see a repeat of this event in the future, and we also received requests from other communities prior to the event to ask if their community could have a Shovel-it Yourself Day. However, these events are quite resource intensive, requiring a team of people to help meet and greet, manage queues and provide assistance where required. As such East Suffolk Council would only be able to organise a maximum of one event per year and this would be dependent on the support of local stakeholders – it would not have been possible for ESC to hold this event successfully had it not been for the support of the local Probation Service and the Suffolk Waste Partnership.

Get into the composting habit

Suffolk residents can get their green fingers on any one of a range of subsidised home composting systems ranging from ordinary compost bins for garden waste and fruit and vegetable waste, as well as other systems that can help deal with some cooked food waste too.

Find out more about the current offer by visiting:

<http://www.suffolk.getcomposting.com/>

