



The Allotment Handbook

This document can be supplied in alternative formats, please contact 0114 250 0500

Sheffield City Council
Parks and Countryside
www.sheffield.gov.uk



When you have finished with
this document please recycle it



Contents



Getting Started 5

Tools & Equipment 9

Access to Water 11



Cultivation 13

Composting 15

Organic & Non Organic 17

Hedges & Trees 19



Weeds 21

**Storing Materials
& Removing Waste** 24

Asbestos 26



Safety 28

Security and Respect 31

Bonfires 33



**Sheds, Greenhouses
& Polytunnels** 35

Keeping Livestock & Pigeons 37

Keeping Bees 39

Wildlife & Pests 41



Rules 43



About This Handbook

This allotment handbook provides you with information about some of the key terms and conditions of your tenancy agreement. We hope that it also contains lots of other useful information as well as important safety advice. Whilst parts of this handbook are aimed at new allotment tenants, there is still plenty of important and useful information for those who have held an allotment tenancy for some time. We therefore ask all tenants, new and old, to make use of this handbook.

It is very important that you read this handbook carefully and that you keep hold of it for future reference.

Allotments can provide a wide range of benefits to tenants, communities, the environment and to wildlife. These benefits can include providing tenants with an opportunity to produce their own inexpensive food, take physical exercise, learn new skills, develop a sense of well-being and to make new friends, to name just a few.

We are committed to improving the quality of life of all the people of Sheffield through the services we provide including the Allotment Service. Our aim is to continue to build on good practices and positive improvements in our Allotment Service by working in partnership with tenant groups, individuals and other agencies. We hope that you will find this handbook useful and that you will be able to refer to it throughout your tenancy. If you have any comments on this handbook please contact us using the contact details provided on page 45.

We would like to wish you every success with your allotment tenancy.



GETTING STARTED

- ✓ Take time to plan the layout of your plot for ease of use
- ✓ Develop a yearly plan of what you will grow
- ✓ Think about shade, ease of access, growing space, watering, etc.
- ✓ Create narrow planting beds to allow easy access to the soil
- ✓ Use crop rotation to keep your soil healthy
- ✓ Manure your plot regularly to maintain soil fertility
- ! Always use gloves and wash your hands after handling manure
- ! Ensure you have good paths and keep paths clear of hazards
- ! Don't do too much in one go but maintain steady and regular progress

Planning Your Allotment

To get off to a good start with your allotment a planned approach and a little determination is all that's needed. Before you start work on your plot draw up a plan of what you would like to grow and where you think it should go; don't worry if this changes over time as you develop more experience.



Drawing Up Your Plan

When drawing up your plan you need to consider:

- Situation and light levels
- Ease of access for maintenance and watering
- Soil condition and drainage
- The space needed for plants to grow and flourish
- Permanent planting areas
- Permanent features such as paths, utilities, buildings, etc.

There are plenty of books and internet resources to help you with

planning your plot and guidance on the best conditions for different plants to flourish. You could also talk to other allotment tenants or your allotment society. Planning should help you to organise your growing to make the best use of the space available to you throughout the year.

Allowable Uses

When planning the layout of your allotment please be aware of the following:

- At least 75% of the total area of your plot **must** be used to cultivate fruit and vegetables
- Fruit trees must be on dwarf rootstock and must not make up more than 25% of the total area of your plot
- Lawns, sheds, compost heaps, flower and herb beds, recreational areas and livestock, when added together, must not take up more than 25% of the total area of your plot
- Greenhouses count as space used for cultivation (provided they are in use)
- If you are allowing an area for livestock you need written permission first (see page 37)



REMEMBER

Only work your soil when it is in the right condition - if it sticks to your boots it is too wet and you will do more harm than good.

TOP TIP - Work off a plank to avoid compaction of your soil.



Paths and Access

Paths should be kept clear of vegetation and potential hazards such as tools or discarded rubbish. Maintaining good paths can also help make it more difficult for some weeds to spread from one planting area to another. Paths should ideally be wide enough for a wheelbarrow (50cm is a good recommended width) and be as level and even as possible to avoid trip hazards. To manage weeds on your paths you may want to put down a weed barrier, such as weed matting, and cover with a durable surface such as wood chip. If your plot doesn't have a door or gate, it is up to you if you wish to install one. You must display the number of your plot at the entrance or another visible location.

Planting Areas

Planting beds can be any shape or size. You will need to consider access by means of paths to ensure you can easily reach into the middle of the planting area. A maximum recommended width is 120cm (4 feet) to enable you to reach the middle from both sides. Remove weeds entirely from your planting area and dig over the soil. The prongs of your fork should eventually go easily into the bed to turn the soil - and don't forget to remove larger stones or other debris that could impede your plant growth. If you mark the edges of your planting area with wood or other materials from your



plot this will help to prevent accidental walking on the area and compaction of the soil. A useful tip is to work off a plank to spread your weight.

Raised Beds

You may also need to consider the height of the planting area. For people with disabilities or back pain, raised beds can be more accessible. Raised beds are also useful if you have poor drainage or if you want to grow something that does not do well in the soil type you have and you need to bring in a different one.

Some allotment sites have raised beds already provided. These have been specifically designed and provided for people with disabilities. Please contact the Allotment Office if this is something you require.

Crop Rotation

Crop rotation involves dividing your crops into three groups based on their preferred growing conditions. Each group is planted in a separate bed and each year the groups are moved to a different bed. In this way no crop should return to the same piece of ground for three years. We recommend that tenants use the crop rotation method to avoid the build-up of pests and diseases and to keep your soil in good condition.

More detailed information about how to do this can be found on the internet or in any good 'grow your own' or other gardening books.



TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

- ✓ **Make sure you know how to use tools effectively**
- ✓ **Keep your tools clean and sharp**
- ✓ **Store tools away from your plot or keep them in a lockable shed**
- ✓ **Only use tools you are confident with**
- ! **Be careful when using power tools and follow instructions for use**

Tools & Equipment

To start with you might only need a few basic tools but you will quickly find that a wide variety are available, many for specific tasks. Essentials include a spade, fork, hoe, rake, hand trowel/fork and gloves. You may also want to invest in secateurs, a pruning saw, shears or loppers, dibber, watering can and wheelbarrow ... the list is endless! To save money you could buy quality second hand tools or share with friends. Some Allotment Societies and groups have tools available for hire. Contact your local Allotment Society or group if you have one.

Power Tools

Only use power tools if you are confident in their use. Read, understand and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully and if necessary make sure you have had appropriate training. **Do not store power tools in sheds.**



Power Tool Safety

Always wear appropriate personal protective clothing, including safety goggles. We also recommend sturdy footwear, if possible with steel toe caps and soles. It is usually a good idea to have a means of emergency contact, such as a mobile phone, close by in case of accident.

Safety Using & Storing Your Tools

- Store all tools safely in a lockable unit and out of the reach of children
- Do not store any power tools or fuel on your plot
- Keep tools clean, sharp and well maintained for ease of use
- Make sure you know how to use tools effectively to avoid injury or strain
- Always wear gloves, sturdy footwear and appropriate personal protective clothing
- Follow instructions for use and/or seek appropriate training for using power tools
- We advise you to security mark tools to make them easier to identify



ACCESS TO WATER

- ✓ Only connect hoses to water taps to top up your water containers
- ✓ Use mains water sparingly and only when needed
- ✓ If you have a shed or greenhouse, use a rainwater collection system
- ✓ Water containers should be covered and located on stable ground
- ✗ Do not use hoses to water your plants directly
- ✗ Sprinklers and other water spraying devices are not allowed
- ! Be careful of trip hazards when using hosepipes
- ! Check what was previously contained in recycled water containers

Access To Water

Water is essential for plants to grow. It is particularly important that seedlings get sufficient water until they become established and roots can find some of their own moisture deeper in the ground. All tenants will need to collect and store water on their plot as direct watering from hosepipes is not allowed. If you are recycling an old container to collect water ensure you know where it has come from and that it did not previously contain any harmful substances. Remember sprinklers and other water spraying devices are **not** allowed. Water containers must be kept covered.

Mains Water Supply

Many sites have a mains water supply which is turned on in April and switched off at the end of October. An additional charge is made if your site has access to mains water. Please only use the water on site to top up your water butts. Taps are for everyone to use so please disconnect your hose as soon as you have finished filling up your water containers.

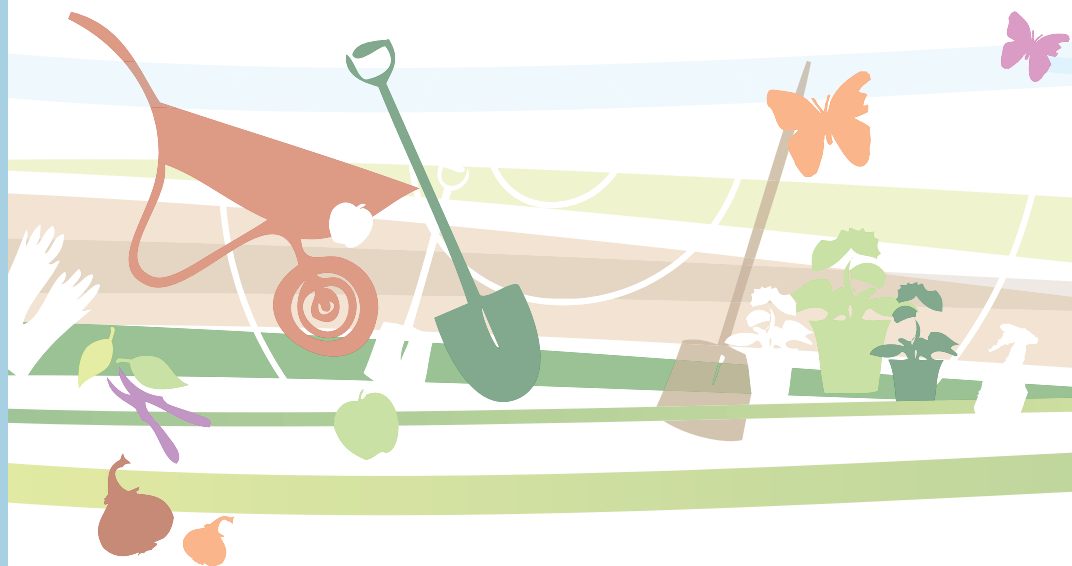


Efficient Water Use

Attach guttering to garden sheds and greenhouses to collect rain water but remember to keep water butts covered and ensure that they are located on stable ground.

Organic matter can be dug into the ground and a thick layer of mulch placed around established plants to help retain moisture in the soil.

Water your allotment in the morning or evening to reduce risk of evaporation or scorching. Give plants a thorough soaking to encourage deep rooting. Also, remember that over-watering can be just as unproductive as under-watering!



CULTIVATION

- ✓ You must use 75% of your plot for growing vegetables and fruit
- ✓ Fruit trees and bushes must be on dwarfing rootstock (M27, M26, M9)
- ✓ Start with easy vegetables that your family will like to eat
- ✓ All plots are inspected at least twice a year

What Can I Grow?

It is a requirement of your tenancy agreement that you keep your plot in a good state of cultivation. This means that you must use your plot to grow mostly vegetables and fruit on an annual basis. Please see the section on 'Getting Started' for allowable uses and information on what you can grow. Remember fruit trees and bushes must be on dwarf rootstock (M27, M26, M9). If you are unsure about rootstocks, ask at a local garden centre or nursery when buying fruit trees.

Where to Begin

If you have not grown fruit and vegetables before then you will probably need to learn as you go along. There is lots of advice available from books and websites. If you are struggling, try attending a vegetable growing course or getting in touch with other tenants or your allotment association for advice. To start with you could grow easy vegetables that you know your family will like such as early potatoes, peas, runner beans and french beans, salads, onion sets, beetroot, courgettes and squashes.





Inspection Process

Allotment sites are inspected at least twice a year and if your plot is not well maintained you may be asked to give up your tenancy. It is therefore important that you develop a regular cultivation routine. You are required to maintain visibility into your plot or allow access for inspections to occur. Although you are given time to cultivate a new plot the Allotment Office will want to see continual progress towards full cultivation. Otherwise you will receive a letter for non-cultivation

Steps Towards Cultivation

After 3 months we would expect to see parts of the plot cleared and dug over. After 6 months we would expect to see some crops in place and the plot substantially dug, or uncultivated areas covered with weed fabric. By the end of the first year of your tenancy we would expect to see the plot in a good state of cultivation. If you have difficulty achieving this please make contact with us.

Non Cultivation

If you are given a letter for non-cultivation you will be allowed one month to make significant improvements. If you fail to do so we will ask you to give up your tenancy. If you receive two letters for non-cultivation within two years you may be asked to reduce the size of your plot to a more manageable half size plot.

COMPOSTING

- ✓ Compost will help you save money, improve your soil, help you grow healthy, strong plants and look after the environment
- ✓ Try to compost as much green waste as you can
- ✓ Creating your own leaf mulch will improve soil texture
- ! If composting perennial weeds, make sure the roots/plants have been destroyed and seed heads removed first
- ! Do not compost any animal products or cooked food
- ! Always use gloves and wash your hands after handling compost

Why Compost?

Compost is a natural, nutrient-rich, soil-like medium of decayed organic matter. It is a product of the natural breakdown of dead plants and other organic matter such as fruit and vegetable peelings. With time and a little bit of care and attention, this organic matter decomposes with the assistance of micro-organisms and earthworms to produce a valuable source of compost. This can improve and enrich the soil, helping to feed your plants and to encourage them to grow strong and healthy.

Making Compost

Making compost is not hard. The easiest method is to purchase a compost bin specially designed for the purpose. If you prefer the DIY approach, you can build your own compost bin. To do this you may want to contain the heap using reclaimed timber and four wooden posts to make a bottomless box; covering will also help to retain moisture. Alternatively, just heap all your organic matter into a big pile in a corner of your plot.



However this method looks less attractive, can suffer from a lack of firmness and can lose the heat generated internally unless covered. Digging or 'turning' your compost occasionally will help to speed up the process.



Leaf Mulch

Creating leaf mulch (leafmould) is completely free and can help to improve your soil texture, suppress weeds and reduce the need for watering. To create leaf mulch gather up autumn leaves (not evergreens and not from roads where they may contain contaminants or under hedges where wildlife may be hibernating) and place them in a big heap. By using four posts and some chicken wire you can create an area that will contain the leaves but still allow air to circulate around them. It will take about two years for most leaves to breakdown fully but digging over occasionally with a fork will help to speed up the process. To use the mulch spread a thick layer on top of the soil around your plants to suppress weeds (allowing worms to eventually pull it down into the soil) or dig it directly into the soil (with your compost) to improve your soil texture.

Safe Composting

Always use gloves when handling compost or manure and wash your hands afterwards. Don't compost cooked food or animal products as these can attract vermin and possibly harmful bacteria or disease.



ORGANIC & NON-ORGANIC

- ✓ Organic methods can benefit your plot, the environment and wildlife
- ✓ You should focus on improving and maintaining soil fertility
- ✓ Companion planting can repel pests and encourage beneficial insects
- ✓ Seek expert advice from your local library or internet
- ✓ Minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers
- ! When using pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers follow the advice below

Growing Organically

Many people are moving towards a more organic approach to gardening. For some people this simply means not using slug pellets or other pesticides. Other people feel more strongly and will use only natural products and materials, buy only organic seed, and the whole idea becomes part of a wider lifestyle choice to live in harmony with nature. Wherever you fall within the organic spectrum we advise all allotment holders to try to minimise their use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. We encourage you to consider more organic approaches for the benefit of local wildlife and the wider environment.



Expert Advice

There is plenty of expert advice readily available in books and on internet sites and you could also visit your local library to find out more. The Sheffield City Council Allotment web page has links to useful web sites - here are two to get you started:
Royal Horticultural Society: www.rhs.org.uk/growyourown
Garden Organic: www.gardenorganic.co.uk

Pesticides, Herbicides and Inorganic Fertilizers

Pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilisers can be helpful when clearing and cultivating an allotment, however they can also be hazardous and have environmental implications. We recommend trying to minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilizers, or reduce the levels of use over time. If you do use them, remember they are not a quick fix and should only be used in specific situations - try to keep use to a minimum and always be mindful of the following important safety advice:

Safety When Using Commercial Products

- Always keep products in their original containers
- Follow the instructions for use carefully
- Do not estimate amounts - measure them carefully
- Use personal protective clothing and gloves
- Wash hands after use and wash off any splashes immediately
- Store out of the reach of children and locked away securely
- Ensure you are not contaminating your neighbours' plots or local watercourses
- Consider the potential harm to beneficial wildlife, pets and children before use
- Check old products to ensure they have not been banned
- Contact your local waste management and recycling centre for disposal advice



HEDGES & TREES

- ✓ **The maximum height of hedges must be 150cm internal or 180cm external**
- ✓ **Contact us for permission and advice before planting new hedging**
- ✓ **Fruit trees must be on dwarf rootstock and pruned for shape and vigour**
- ✓ **Before cutting your hedges please read the safety tips overleaf**
- ✗ **Do not remove existing hedging or create new entrances to your plot**
- ✗ **No large, standard or ornamental trees are allowed; please contact us if you have these on your plot already**

Hedges

Maintenance of hedges is the responsibility of tenants. Internal hedges (between plots) should be no higher than 150cm (5ft). External hedges (at the edge of a site or facing out from your plot onto a path if your site is open to the public) can be up to a maximum of 180cm (6ft) in height. Please note you are not allowed to erect fences or plant hedges without written permission. Shared hedges should be maintained jointly by the tenants on either side. It is an offence to disturb nesting birds so please check your hedges before cutting.

Please note that you cannot create any additional access points to your plot or remove existing hedging without written permission.

Trees

No large or ornamental trees are allowed on your allotment plot. If you already have large trees on your plot then please contact us. Tree removal must only be carried out by qualified professionals.



Fruit Trees

Fruit trees are allowed provided they are on dwarf rootstock. Please see the Allowable Uses guide on page 6 for more information about how much fruit you are allowed to grow. The trees should be well maintained and regularly pruned for shape and to control vigour.

Maintenance & Safety

- Don't tackle more than you can manage in one go
- Special care should be taken if working above head height
- Use appropriate, sharp and well-maintained tools to avoid injury or strain
- Make sure you know how to use tools effectively to avoid injury or strain
- Always wear gloves, sturdy footwear and appropriate protective clothing
- Follow instructions for use or seek appropriate training if using power tools
- Tree removal must only be carried out by qualified professionals - in all circumstances contact the Allotment Office for further advice



WEEDS

- ✓ **Keep your plot free from weeds**
- ✓ **Don't let weeds set seed**
- ✓ **Cover areas with weed matting until you are ready to work them**
- ✓ **Annual weeds and vegetation can be composted**
- ✓ **Be sure to remove all roots of perennial weeds**
- ! **When strimming overgrown areas be aware of hazards such as holes, bricks, rubbish, glass, etc. and wear protective clothing**

Removing Weeds

When taking on a new plot there are likely to be plenty of weeds. Be prepared for lots of hard work to clear the plot properly, but remember it is a job worth doing. Careful weed removal and preparation of the soil at this stage will reap future benefits!

Regular Weeding

To keep on top of weeds you need to make frequent visits to your plot, especially during the main growing season, and make weeding a regular task. Digging over the ground and removing roots is the only really effective organic way to remove weeds but other methods can help.

Weedkillers (Herbicides)

These generally fall into two types: contact and systemic. Contact herbicides can be useful for large areas of annual weeds and usually work on contact with foliage. They have minimal impact on perennial weeds, such as nettles or brambles, and are best avoided on allotments - save your money and use a hoe instead!

Systemic weed killers, such as Glyphosate, destroy plants from within, including their roots, usually following a spray application to the foliage. They are therefore useful for controlling perennial weeds such as bindweed, couch grass, ground elder and bramble. We advise restricting their use to the initial clearance of plots, after

which any regrowth can be tackled by hand weeding. It is important that you check any old products you may have stored in your shed. Many commonly used products have now been withdrawn from sale due to their adverse impact on the environment and their use is now banned. If you continue to use such products you will be breaking the law.

Weed Matting (woven porous polythene or geotextile)

Weed matting is relative inexpensive and can be really useful under paths and as a temporary cover to suppress weeds until an area can be worked. It is also possible to grow some crops (e.g. courgettes) through holes in the matting. Carpet is best avoided as some types can leach chemicals into the soil and they are difficult to dispose of once past their useful life on a plot.

Mulches

Examples of mulches are compost and leaf mould, all of which need to be applied in a layer 50mm to 75mm (2-3 inches) thick. Placed on top of the soil, surrounding your plants or over weed matting, these will act as an effective weed suppressor.

Disposing Of Weeds

You can compost annual weeds (avoid seed heads) but roots of perennial weeds will grow again if they are composted before they are killed. Use the internet or a good gardening book to help you identify common annual and perennial weeds. Only burn vegetation (at the appropriate times) if absolutely necessary and read the section on 'Bonfires' first.



How To Weed Safely

- Don't tackle more than you can manage in one go
- Use appropriate, sharp and well-maintained tools
- Be aware of plant species that cause irritation or are poisonous
- Wear suitable clothing, including gloves and long sleeves
- Don't use old carpet to suppress weeds - it is difficult to remove and can potentially leach hazardous chemicals into the soil
- Remember that vegetation which has grown out of control can hide hazards such as potholes, bricks, rubbish, glass, etc.
- If you are strimming, check for and remove any hazards hidden in the vegetation
- Use weedkillers only when needed and always sparingly

If using herbicides or weed killers please follow the additional safety advice:

- Always keep products in their original containers
- Use only for the specific purpose indicated on the product label and follow instructions carefully
- Measure amounts carefully for maximum effectiveness and use only the amount required for that application
- Use personal protective clothing and gloves
- Wash hands after use and wash off any splashes immediately
- Store out of the reach of children and locked away securely
- Ensure you are not contaminating your neighbours' plots or local watercourses via airborne drift or improper disposal
- Contact your waste management and recycling centre for disposal advice
- Check old products to see if they have been banned



Invasive Species

Please inform us immediately if you have any invasive species on your plot as you may need specialist advice to remove them. A complete list can be found in the Health and Advice section on the following website www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/wildlife/31350.aspx. Ones to watch out for on allotments include: Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

STORING MATERIALS & WASTE

- ✓ Keep stored materials on your plot to a minimum
- ✓ Take care when handling rubbish - wear gloves and appropriate protective clothing
- ✓ Dispose of rubbish thoughtfully and recycle materials where possible
- ✗ Do not leave rubbish in communal areas
- ✗ Please do not bring tyres and carpets on plots as they are difficult to dispose of

Storing Materials On Your Plot

Allotments must not be used for storing materials. Having excessive quantities of materials on plots reduces the area available for cultivation and can pose a hazard to yourself and others. Please only bring materials onto your plot if you intend to use them immediately and, if necessary, store them safely and tidily.

Excessive Amounts of Material

We will write to tenants who are storing excessive amounts of materials on their plot. By law we can recover the cost of removing excessive waste materials from a plot either during or at the end of a tenancy. **Remember you must not bring rubbish on site.**



Waste Disposal

When you take on a plot you may find rubbish and other debris, which we ask you to remove and dispose of carefully. Many materials can easily be transported off-site for recycling or safe disposal at one of the City Council's waste recycling facilities. Materials such as wood or bricks can be reused on the plot, saving the need to send materials to landfill. If you come across material on your plot that is difficult to dispose of, we ask you to try to remove as much as possible safely before contacting us for further assistance.

Skips

From time to time there may be a skip available on site for the disposal of bulky materials. Please be considerate when filling skips so that everyone can benefit from them. It is an offence to leave waste materials in a communal location, including in areas where a skip has previously been sited or in expectation of a skip. Any rubbish left when a skip is removed will be treated as fly tipping. Misuse of skips will result in the facility being withdrawn.

Safety

- Please take extra care with certain materials, such as wood with protruding nails or broken glass
- Please read the sections on 'Asbestos' and 'Assessing Risks' before you start clearing your plot
- Wear gloves, sturdy footwear and protective clothing when removing waste
- Excessive materials stored on site can pose a hazard to yourself and others
- Materials on your plot must be stored safely.



ASBESTOS

- ✓ Clearly identify the material in question - if in doubt, seek advice
- ✓ Follow the guidelines for safe disposal carefully
- ✓ Contact the Allotment Office if you need further guidance or assistance
- ✗ Do not bring asbestos onto the allotment
- ! Wear the necessary protective clothing when handling asbestos
- ! Dispose of all asbestos properly at a Council waste recycling facility

Asbestos

Asbestos was once a common building material and has found its way onto some allotments. The overwhelming majority of asbestos found on allotments is in the form of asbestos cement sheeting used for sheds/buildings and their roofs. This has a minimal asbestos content, usually of around 1% but sometimes up to 15% depending on the type.

Structures Containing Asbestos

Provided the structures are of sound construction and in good condition, there is no need to remove them and you can continue to use them safely. As a precaution **do not** hammer or drill into the structures as this could cause the release of asbestos fibres. It is the inhalation of these minute fibres, and not the material in solid form, which is harmful to health.

Removing Asbestos

On no account should you seek to remove structures described on page 26 without guidance from an approved asbestos removal contractor. In all cases, if you have any concerns about asbestos, please contact the Allotment Office. It is vital that the material is correctly identified prior to its removal and disposal.

Occasionally you might find small amounts of asbestos loose on the plot. Where you come across undamaged pieces of asbestos, such as corrugated sheeting or pipes, the following guidelines will help you deal with them safely and effectively:

- Clearly identify whether the material is asbestos and of which type - if in doubt, ask
- Handle only solid and unbroken pieces of asbestos - **do not break or damage when handling**
- Dampen the asbestos with water to reduce the risk of fibres being released if damaged
- For personal safety wear protective gloves and a dust mask
- Double bag the asbestos using fully sealed plastic bags and tape shut
- Remove from the site carefully and take to a Council waste recycling facility for safe disposal

If you follow the above guidelines you should have no problems removing asbestos cement products safely from your plot. If you are in any doubt, have concerns about an unidentified material on your plot, or if you require help with the safe removal of asbestos, please contact the Allotment Office for further guidance and assistance.



SAFETY

- ✓ Tenants have a duty of care to everyone on their plot, regardless of whether they have permission to be there
- ✓ Assessing risk is an ongoing process
- ✓ High risks must be removed immediately
- ✓ Always bear in mind your health and physical ability
- ! Being aware of a particular risk does not remove the risk it may pose to others
- ! Be aware there may be particular risks for children on allotment plots

Assessing Risk

Health and safety on allotments is everyone's responsibility and as a tenant you need to make sure that your plot is as safe as possible for everyone. Tenants have a duty of care to anyone on their plot, regardless of whether they have given permission for them to be there. We may also enforce action to remove health and safety concerns. When thinking about hazards you need to look at the potential risks to: **yourself, your family, co-workers, visitors to your plot, intruders (including children), wildlife.**

Hazards

To assess dangers on your plot you first need to identify hazards that have the potential to cause harm. We have listed some common hazards below but you may also have others on your plot. We have also used the caution symbol on the right throughout this booklet to help you to identify potential hazards.

Common allotment hazards include: buildings, fire, hazardous materials (asbestos, fuel, combustibles, refuse, scrap metal, glass, chemicals, manure, compost, etc.), trees, vegetation (overgrown, irritant or poisonous), tools, ponds, water, fences and vermin.



Reducing Risk

Once you have a list of hazards you need to look at potential risks. Risk is the likelihood that the harm from a hazard will happen (e.g. a sharp blade concealed in overgrown grass is more likely to cause harm than one stored away in a locked shed).

Levels of Risk

You need to identify risks as potentially being 'high', 'medium' or 'low'. High risks must be removed immediately before removing or minimising any medium risks. If you have a high risk hazard on your plot that you feel unable to deal with please contact the Allotment Office as soon as possible.

Personal Health

- **Tetanus** - Tetanus is an illness caused by bacteria present in soil and manure, which can enter the body through the tiniest abrasion, scratch, thorn, puncture or cut. Your GP may be able to offer a vaccination.
- **First Aid** - A first aid kit is always a wise addition to the tools kept in the garden shed. A small selection of adhesive plasters, antiseptic ointment, sting cream, a pair of tweezers for removing thorns and splinters and a gauze or lint pad to use as a compress to stop bleeding if you are badly cut are useful contents.
- **Exercise** - Having an allotment can be hard work so please be mindful of your own capabilities and physical limitations and build up slowly, particularly if you are not used to it! If you have a known medical condition you may want to seek medical advice before starting work on your plot. **Thrive** is an organisation to help people who have ill health or a disability to garden and more tips and advice can be found on their website at: www.thrive.org.uk
- **Wash Hands and Use Gloves** - There is a risk of illness from bacteria (such as E.coli) which can be present in animal manure and even home made compost. Please wash your hands regularly and always wear protective gloves when handling potentially harmful substances.

- **Sun Protection** - If you are spending long periods on your plot then please ensure you have adequate sun protection and limit your exposure to strong sunshine. Also, keep yourself hydrated by regularly drinking water or other soft drinks and avoid physical exertion during the hottest part of the day.



Children

The health and safety of children on an allotment plot must be considered carefully as allotments can pose particular risks to children. **Remember you must never leave children unsupervised on an allotment site.**

Hazards for Children

Before allowing children onto your plot remove/reduce any hazards. As well as those highlighted overleaf, particular hazards for children include:

- Glass or other debris lying around your plot
- Garden canes which could cause an eye injury
- Hazardous chemicals and sharp tools stored incorrectly
- Glass structures such as greenhouses
- Ponds and uncovered water containers
- Vegetation that can cause harm or irritation
- Sun exposure

Young children may also eat soil or plants so please ensure that they are watched closely until they are old enough to know what to eat and what to avoid. It is particularly important that young children wash their hands regularly, especially those prone to putting their hands in their mouths. Please ensure your children do not cause a nuisance to other plot holders.



SECURITY AND RESPECT

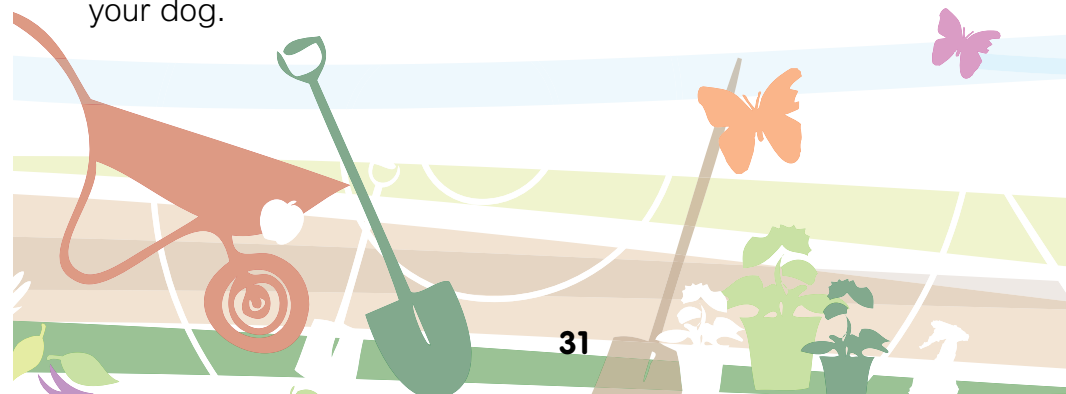
- ✓ Consider security at all times - all tenants have a responsibility for maintaining security on their site
- ✓ Please respect tenants, neighbours and other members of the public on your site
- ✓ Please read and put into practice the checklist on page 32
- ✓ Report any incidents to the police (using 101 for non emergencies or 999 for emergencies)
- ✓ Please make the Allotment Office aware of any incidents
- ✓ Please keep dogs on a lead
- ✗ Do not visit other plots without permission or cause a nuisance to your neighbours

Security on Allotments

Many of us find that time on allotments is both tranquil and enjoyable. Plot holders spend a considerable amount of time on their plots and put in a lot of effort, keeping their plot well maintained and productive. It can therefore be very distressing if your site suffers from incidents of vandalism or anti-social behaviour. The tips overleaf are aimed at increasing plot security and reducing vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Respect

As an allotment holder you are expected to be courteous and respectful to other users of the site and neighbouring properties (this is a condition of your tenancy). Everyone is entitled to enjoy their plot. If you own a dog then out of respect for others we request that the dog is kept on a lead and you must clean up after your dog.



Security Checklist

- **Keep your plot well maintained.**

A well tended plot is a lot less likely to attract vandals than one that looks uncared for.

- **Don't leave any valuables on site.**

If possible take all tools with you when you leave. Any tools left on your plot should be security marked.

- **Don't use or keep combustible or dangerous materials on your plot.**

- **Dispose of rubbish appropriately.**

A site that is well presented and looks used and cared for can help to reduce anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping.

- **Keep your site and your plot secure.**

If your site has fencing keep the gates locked at all times.

- **Barbed wire, razor wire or similar are not allowed under any circumstances.**

- **Be a good neighbour.**

Looking out for one another will help make your site feel safer. Don't cause a nuisance to your neighbours and don't visit other plots without permission.

- **Be aware of personal safety when working on your own.**

Always let someone know where you are and, if possible, have a means of contact such as a mobile phone.

- **Join your Allotment Society.**

Allotment Societies need your support and many are working in partnership with us to improve safety on allotments.

- **Report all incidents.**

The police target resources at areas where crime is most often reported. Please report all incidents using the 101 number (or 999 if someone is at risk or it is an emergency). Please let the Allotment Office know of any incidents but please note we are not able to report them to the police on your behalf.



BONFIRES

FIRES ARE NOT PERMITTED BETWEEN 1st MAY AND 30th SEPTEMBER

- ✓ **Outside this period, you must still only have a bonfire if absolutely necessary**
- ✓ **Composting is a much better alternative for disposing of organic waste**
- ✓ **Be considerate to your neighbours**
- ✓ **Do not bring any materials on site to burn**
- ✓ **Do not burn anything that could produce toxic or noxious fumes**
- ! **Always follow the essential precautions and guidance below**

When To Have A Bonfire

Bonfires are only permitted between 1st October and 30th April. Burning must be kept to a minimum and composting should be used wherever possible. Although bonfires can be a good way of disposing of some materials, such as diseased prunings, they can cause major problems for you, your family and friends and also for neighbours.

Smoke nuisance from bonfires generates a number of complaints to the Allotment Office each year and the Office reserves the right to ban fires on sites where there is a persistent problem. If a bonfire is necessary, we encourage tenants to burn as close to 5th November as possible, and where possible avoid burning at weekends and on Bank Holidays.



Alternatives

Green waste should be composted where possible. Non-green waste, such as carpet or plastic, should never be burned and disposal should be through your nearest waste management centre. Recycle materials whenever practical.

If You Need To Have A Bonfire

Think first before burning. Remember that fires are not permitted between 1st May and 30th September. If you do need to have a bonfire outside of this period, you must follow the precautions and guidance below. Under no circumstances should material be brought onto a site to be burned - this is a breach of your tenancy.

Precautions and Guidance

- Keep the fire small and under control at all times
- Never use an accelerant to light or encourage the fire
- Never dispose of garden chemicals on a fire
- Never burn anything that could produce noxious fumes, including: household rubbish, rubber, plastic, paint, foam, carpets, aerosols, china, batteries, etc.
- Do not burn green or damp materials - they will produce excessive smoke
- Consider weather conditions/wind direction - **do not** light a fire if conditions are unsuitable
- Only burn if the wind is blowing smoke away from nearby houses and roads - it is an offence for smoke to obstruct a highway
- Burn later in the day so that people have the chance to dry washing and enjoy their outdoor space during the daytime
- Never leave a fire unattended
- Always site the fire as far away as possible from hedges, fences and other structures.



SHEDS, GREENHOUSES & POLYTUNNELS

- ✓ **Permission is not needed for the first structure provided it is within the stated size guidelines**
- ✓ **Permission is needed for any subsequent structures**
- ✓ **You must stick to the size limits given below**
- ✓ **All structures should be sound, well maintained and of good appearance**

Sheds, Greenhouses & Polytunnels

You may wish to think about putting a shed, greenhouse or polytunnel on your plot. Greenhouses and polytunnels extend your growing season and increase the range of crops you can grow. Sheds can be used for shelter and storage. No permission is required for the first structure. No permanent foundations or structures are allowed.



Sheds

Sheds must not exceed 240cm (8ft) x 300cm (10ft) and must be well maintained. The Allotment Office can give you advice on council approved designs. If you choose to construct your own it must not differ too greatly from the standard designs. Sheds must be stained brown or painted green. If you intend to store tools in your shed please ensure you have secure,



lockable storage areas and do not store power tools or flammables. We recommend that you do not store anything of value in sheds on allotments.

Greenhouses & Polytunnels

Greenhouses must not exceed 240cm (8ft) x 300cm (10ft); polytunnels must not exceed 300cm (10ft) x 450cm (15ft). The Allotment Office can advise you of approved greenhouse designs if required. If you construct your own, the design must not differ too greatly from the standard types and it must be well-maintained.



Safety

- Don't store glass on your plot and be aware of any broken glass
- Ensure safe construction and regularly check and maintain all structures
- Don't store dangerous tools, combustibles or chemicals on site, even in a locked shed
- If you have an issue with a derelict or dangerous structure on your plot, please contact us



LIVESTOCK & PIGEONS

- ✓ Written permission is needed before keeping any livestock or pigeons
- ✓ If allowed, you can have up to 6 chickens and/or 2 rabbits per plot
- ✓ Pigeons are only allowed on designated plots
- ✗ Keeping any other animals is not allowed
- ! You are responsible for the care, welfare, nuisance, health risks or damage caused

Written permission is required from the Allotment Office before keeping chickens, rabbits or pigeons. Keeping any other animals, for example dogs, on your allotment is not allowed.

Housing and Welfare

When inspecting plots with livestock or pigeons on them we will also be considering the suitability of housing and the welfare of the animals/birds. When you write to us for permission to keep livestock or pigeons, we will advise you on what type of facilities and housing are acceptable.

Chickens and Rabbits

Provided that 75% of your plot is used for growing vegetables and fruit you are usually allowed to keep up to 6 chickens (hens, no cockerels) and/or 2 rabbits per plot. There may be some local restrictions on keeping livestock on certain sites - contact the Allotment Office for further information.



Pigeons

Pigeon-keeping is only permitted at specially designated sites. On some plots purpose-built pigeon lofts are provided and a higher rent is charged for these plots. Plots used for pigeon-keeping should still be well-maintained in accordance with your tenancy agreement.

Keeping Livestock and Pigeons

Keeping livestock or pigeons on your plot can be costly and you are responsible for the care, welfare, nuisance, health risks or damage caused. If you wish to keep chickens, rabbits or pigeons, you must have:

- Knowledge, training or experience concerning physical/behavioural needs, appropriate diet, recognising injury/disease and when vet assistance is needed, handling animals safely, carrying out daily hygiene tasks, etc.
- The ability, time and money to ensure welfare and care needs are met
- Approved and secure housing providing the right type of living environment
- Storage for food away from the plot or in a metal bin, to avoid attracting rats
- A good understanding of personal safety and hygiene
- Availability as a 24 hour emergency contact
- Suitable insurance
- Support from your neighbours
- Awareness of, and willingness to comply with, animal welfare regulations

Please be aware that legislation and policies with regards to livestock and pigeons are subject to change. You must comply with all current legislation and regulations. If you decide that you would like to keep livestock or pigeons please contact us at an early stage to discuss current policy and any local restrictions that may apply. Remember that you always need written permission.



KEEPING BEES

- ✓ **Written permission is needed before keeping any bees**
- ✓ **Where allowed, up to a maximum of 6 hives per site can be agreed**
- ! **Bees may not be allowed on certain allotment sites**
- ! **You are responsible for the care, welfare, nuisance, health risks or any damage caused**

Beekeeping

On certain sites up to 6 beehives can be allowed per site (not plot) subject to appropriate checks and permission.

Beekeeping can help to enhance local biodiversity and can be a very rewarding hobby. However, significant costs may be incurred and health and safety implications must be considered carefully. Costs associated with beekeeping include installing hives, equipment, protective clothing, training and insurance.



Getting Permission

Due to the risk of bee stings, you will need to liaise closely with the Allotment Office, tenants of neighbouring plots and, if you have one, your Allotment Society or Association. Formal permission to keep bees on an allotment plot will only be granted once we are satisfied that all the necessary measures are in place. Even if we have given you permission you will remain fully liable for any nuisance or harm the bees may cause. In some areas it may not be possible to allow tenants to install bee hives and the Allotment Office reserves the right to refuse permission.

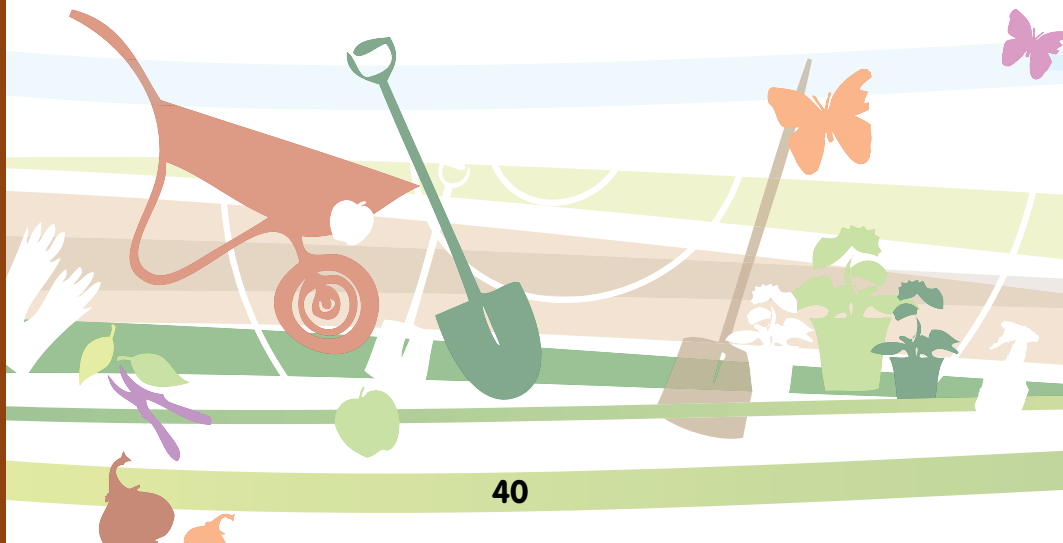
Requirements for Beekeeping

If you are going to keep bees we require that you:

- Have relevant public liability insurance
- Can prove the necessary skills, knowledge or experience
- Have knowledge of how to handle bees safely
- Provide 24 hour emergency contact details
- Take full responsibility for any nuisance or harm the bees may cause
- Can demonstrate support from your neighbours
- Have an awareness of, and willingness to comply with, any regulations concerning keeping bees

We also strongly recommend that you consider joining the British Beekeepers' Association. Further information on beekeeping can be obtained from their website <http://www.britishbee.org.uk>.

Please be aware that legislation and policies with regards to beekeeping are subject to change. You must comply with all current legislation and regulations. If you decide that you would like to keep bees, please contact us at an early stage to discuss current policy and any local restrictions that may apply. Remember you always need written permission.



WILDLIFE & PESTS

- ✓ Wildlife is often beneficial and should be encouraged
- ✓ Creating a pond can encourage beneficial predators
- ✓ Good cultivation and keeping your plot tidy can avoid problems with unwelcome wildlife
- ✓ Only use commercial products (poisons, slug pellets, etc.) as a last resort
- ✓ Always follow instructions for use when using commercial products
- ✓ Use netting to avoid pigeon damage

Beneficial Wildlife

Allotments provide a range of habitats for birds, small mammals, amphibians and insects to name but a few. Many animals are beneficial to gardeners as they prey on pests such as aphids, slugs and snails. As far as possible, tenants should look to share their allotments with local wildlife. Birds can be encouraged with nest boxes and feeders placed in trees. Small wildlife ponds will create a habitat for amphibians and insects. Remember to check for nesting birds before cutting your hedges.



Unwelcome Wildlife

Rats are attracted by uncultivated areas, spaces under sheds, piles of debris and open compost heaps as well as available food, such as unharvested crops and excess livestock feed. Keeping your plot tidy and well cultivated helps deter them. If further action is required products for dealing with rats are available from DIY stores but only use in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

The Allotment Office will only take action if there is a severe infestation which cannot be contained by the above measures and which impacts on the wider community.

Pigeons can be a problem, particularly on sites located close to woodland or agricultural land. The only way to ensure protection for crops is to cover them with netting. Please be mindful to secure nets properly so that birds do not become trapped in loose netting. It is advisable to check netting after heavy snowfall or strong winds which may cause it to collapse.

Foxes generally do not cause too many problems and the main issue is unwanted digging, particularly if animal-based fertilisers such as blood, fish and bone are used. The best way to avoid this is to minimise the use of such products and to cover areas of freshly-dug soil. If you keep rabbits, chickens or pigeons on your plot, make sure their housing is sturdy enough to withstand potential attacks by foxes.

Safety Around Wildlife

- Contact with animal faeces can be harmful - always wear gloves and wash your hands regularly.
- If using commercial products to control wildlife follow the safety advice given on page 18.
- Site and design ponds carefully - think about potential hazards to children and animals who may visit your plot. Ponds must not be more than 1ft deep and can be covered with a strong plastic mesh for safety.



RULES

- ✓ Your tenancy agreement outlines the rules in full - please read it
- ✓ Rent must be paid within 40 days of it becoming due
- ✓ If you have a co-worker tell the Allotment Office
- ✓ Please notify us if any of your details change (e.g. your address)
- ✓ Keys for sites can only be provided through the Allotment Office
- ✓ At the end of your tenancy you must remove any locks
- ✓ Please notify us if you intend to give up your tenancy
- ✓ Council Officers must be allowed access to your plot
- ✓ All problems should be reported to the Allotment Office
- ✗ You cannot sub-let your plot
- ✗ You cannot use your plot for any trade or business

Allotment Tenancy Agreement

Allotment use is subject to legislation. It is therefore important that you read your tenancy agreement carefully and follow the rules set out in it. To help you we have included some basic dos and don'ts above and also throughout this booklet. Remember your tenancy agreement is a legally binding document and if you do not adhere to the rules you may lose your tenancy.

Rent

Allotment rents must be paid within 40 days of receipt of an invoice. A letter that comes with your bill explains the full charges and how and where to pay. Your rent letter will also include details of any rent increases next year as we must provide you with 12 months' prior notice.



Sharing and Co-working

You may wish to share your plot with someone else. If you would like the person you are sharing with to have any rights with regards to the tenancy agreement then you must register them with the Allotment Office as a co-worker.

You cannot sub-let your plot (charge others a rent for using it) and any tenant found to be doing this will have their tenancy terminated.

Transfers

Transferring to another plot may be possible provided you are leaving your current plot in a re-lettable condition. Transfer of tenancy between immediate family members is allowed. You will only be allowed to transfer your tenancy to someone outside your immediate family if:

- they are at the top of the waiting list for that site; or
- they have been registered as a co-worker on your plot for as long as the person at the top of the list has been waiting.

If in doubt, please contact the Allotment Office.

Trading

You cannot use your plot to sell produce for any trade or business. Trade or business can include events/activities on an allotment. If in doubt please contact the Allotment Office. Allotment Societies may be able to sell trade goods and surplus produce provided the proceeds are reinvested into the site and for no other purpose.

Changing Your Details

If any of your personal details change please notify us in writing (including email) as soon as possible.

Keys

Keys to allotment sites can only be obtained through the Allotment Office and a small charge will be made. If you choose to lock your individual plot you must make keys available to the Allotment Office on request and remove locks at the end of your tenancy. Remember that access to your plot must be allowed for Council Officers when required.

Giving up your plot

You must contact us in writing or by email as soon as possible if you wish to end your tenancy. Please remove any of your property at the end of your tenancy and any plants you wish to keep. Anything left on your plot after the end date will become the property of the Council.

Problems

Any problems that arise on your plot or allotment site during your tenancy should be reported to the Allotment Office.

Contact Us

You can contact the Allotment Office using the following methods:

By post at:

**Allotment Office, West Wing, Level 3,
Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PL**

By Email at: pwc.allotments@sheffield.gov.uk

By Telephone on: 0114 273 4528

By Website: www.sheffield.gov.uk/out-about/parks-woodlands--countryside/allotments



Notes

