

ALLOTMENT GARDENING

GROW YOUR OWN: The Cardiff Allotment Guide



**Parks and Sports Service
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Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for everyone involved in Allotments, but is particularly aimed at new allotment holders. It provides basic information about your tenancy agreement, details of how to pay for your plot, contact points and guidance on how to cultivate your allotment.

For more detailed information about the way in which Cardiff's Allotments are managed and the specific roles of the Site secretary and other parties, **Managing Allotments: the Cardiff Allotment management Guide** is available to view on request from your local Site Secretary.

Cardiff Allotment holders competition
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1.0 UNDERSTANDING THE ALLOTMENT RULES

What are the rules for?

The Allotments Act and your Tenancy Agreement dictate how your allotment can be used. The agreement is a legal document and failure to comply with it could result in the termination of your tenancy.

Summary of the rules

Please note: This summary is provided as a guide to help you understand your tenancy agreement. It is provided for information purposes only and is not legally binding. It does not replace the terms and conditions of your Allotment Tenancy Agreement.

Under your Allotment Tenancy Agreement, you are expected to:

1. Maintain your plot in good condition

This means you must:

- Cultivate all of your plot, keeping it weed free and well-manured.
- Clear all weeds to prevent them from setting seed and causing nuisance to others.
- Maintain pathways between your plot and those surrounding it in good condition and free from any obstructions.
- Display your plot number clearly within the allotment plot.
- Maintain any sheds, greenhouses or other structures in good condition, otherwise you may be asked to remove them.
- Leave the plot in good condition, free from rubbish and structures if you decide to terminate your tenancy. The Council will recover the costs of doing this from you if you fail to do so.

2. Use your allotment only for the approved purpose

This means you must:

- Use your Allotment plot only for growing produce. You cannot keep livestock and you are not permitted to cut or prune trees for timber. However, you are permitted to prune fruit trees on your plot.
- Cultivate your plot for the benefit of you and your family and friends. Allotments are not to be used for trade, business or retail.
- Cultivate the plot yourself. No part of the plot should be sub-let to any other person.
- Get permission to locate any building or structure on the plot (see Section 6). No buildings on site are to be used for sleeping accommodation and you must not install any hard surface or patio on your plot.

3. Be a responsible allotment holder:

This means you must:

- Always ensure that the gate(s) to the allotment are locked after entering or leaving the site.
- Keep your keys for your own use. Do not give site keys to other people or allow them to visit the site unsupervised.
- Ensure your dog remains on your plot at all times if brought to the site
- Closely supervise any children you bring with you, ensuring they remain on your plot. The allotment site is not a playground.
- Avoid causing nuisance, damage or annoyance to the council, other allotment tenants or the residents of surrounding property/land.

Nuisance could include the use of bad or abusive language, getting drunk, playing loud music or lighting bonfires. No fires are allowed on allotment plots.

- Ensure no noxious, dangerous or carcinogenic materials are present on the allotment plot. The use of materials containing asbestos is not permitted.
- Be courteous to other plot holders. Do not use any threatening or abusive behaviour on the site, either physical or verbal.
- Make sure your plot is kept in a tidy condition. You are not allowed to bring domestic refuse onto the site or allow any waste materials to accumulate on the plot. Old carpets must not be used to cover bare ground before planting. See Section 5 for alternative ways of reducing weed growth.
- Retain all topsoil and subsoil on your plot. You may not remove or sell any mineral, gravel, sand or clay from the allotment site.
- Visit the site only in daylight hours. Do not visit before sunrise or after sunset.

4. Reduce, re-use and recycle

This means you must:

- Compost all soft vegetable waste on your plot, compost and recycle as much as possible
- Use water sparingly, harvest rainwater where possible. Consider collecting rain water in water tanks for use on the plot. Do not use hosepipes.

5. Get appropriate permission from the Council when required

You will need formal permission for:

- Planting trees (other than small growing fruit trees) on an allotment site
- Building a shed, greenhouse, pond, fence or any other structure on the allotment

6. Ensure payments and records are up to date

This means you must:

- Be a Cardiff resident to hold an allotment, unless the Council consents otherwise.
- Pay your rent promptly when you receive your bill
- Contact the Council if you change your address
- Tell the both the Council and the Site Secretary when you decide to give up your plot, we have waiting lists for all sites

What happens if I breach the rules?

Your tenancy may be terminated if you do not comply with the allotment rules.

Depending on how you have breached the rules this will happen in one of two ways:

1. Breach of rules, including non payment of rent

The Council will give you one months notice in writing that tenancy is to be terminated.

2. Conviction of theft from any allotment plot by the tenant or any person invited by them onto the allotment site

Your Tenancy Agreement will terminate immediately and without notice

2.0 PAYING FOR YOUR PLOT

Allotment invoices

Invoices for new plots will be issued as soon as the Council has received a completed tenancy agreement and undertaking form. Invoices are issued annually in January for the Allotment year which runs from the 2 February each year.

How is my payment calculated?

This is how we will calculate your first payment:

- Tenants who take on an allotment before 1 December in any year will be sent an invoice for that year.
- Tenants who take on an allotment between 1 December and 1 February will be sent an allotment invoice shortly after 1 January for the following allotment year
- One invoice will be issued per plot and any allotment invoice sent will include both rent and water charges.
- Please note you will be notified of the annual rental increase a minimum of 28 days before the invoice is issued.

When tenants receive an invoice, payment methods are clearly listed on the invoice. Cheques should be made payable to **Cardiff Council**.

Reduced Allotment rent

Tenants are entitled to a reduced rent for an allotment plot if they are:

- Over 60 years of age
- MAX card holders

You should provide your date of birth and details of your MAX card when you sign your tenancy agreement form.

3.0 WHO TO CONTACT

Site Secretary

Once you have signed your tenancy agreement form and paid the relevant deposit, an allotment site key will be issued to you by the Site Secretary. Your deposit will be refunded on return of the key to the Site Secretary at the end of your tenancy.

If you have any queries about your plot, allotment site or allotment-holding in general, the Site Secretary will be able to help you in the first instance.

Allotment Association

Most allotment sites in Cardiff have an Allotment Association. These can be of great benefit to you as an allotment tenant, providing advice and information, easy access to discount gardening materials and a voice for your comments and concerns. Any enquiries concerning membership can be made via your Site Secretary.

Council Allotment Officer

Any enquiries concerning applications for further allotments, termination of an allotment tenancy or changes in your personal circumstances affecting the upkeep of your allotment must be addressed to the Council.

4.0 GETTING STARTED

As soon as your Allotment Tenancy Agreement form has been signed by all parties, your tenancy has officially started. New tenants should begin work on their allotment without delay, in accordance with the Undertaking Form. There is high demand for allotments across Cardiff and failure to cultivate your plot could result in the termination of your tenancy.

Marking your plot

In order to assist the administration of allotments, you are asked to make sure that your plot number is clearly displayed in an obvious position on your plot. You should not move any marker pegs.

Basic guidance

- Be prepared to give a regular commitment of time – a little and often is best
- Only work the soil when conditions are favourable, if the soil is too wet, you will do more harm than good
- Work to maintain soil fertility
- Take account of the weather and seasons of the year
- Digging in late autumn will take advantage of winter frosts to help break down the soil
- Remove debris and weeds from the plot: Take all rubbish and non-compostable material home
- Dig **OUT** all perennial weeds
- Dig **IN** all annual weeds that have not formed seed heads
- When using chemical weedkiller, be respectful of neighbouring gardeners and always follow the manufacturers recommendations

What tools do you need?



The basic minimum requirement::
Watering Can, Dutch Hoe, Fork, Spade, Rake and Trowel

Choose your tools with care as low priced bargains are not always a sound investment. Make sure the weight, shape and size, and balance are right for you; you should be able to use them with comfort and ease. Digging can cause back problems so a little and often is a good way to start. For people with difficulties, there are specialist tools to make the task easier. Some site associations offer to loan tools and equipment at minimal or no charge, especially wheelbarrows. Check with your Site Secretary.

5.0 QUICK GUIDE TO PLANTING

Where to start?

Prior to digging, overgrown weedy ground should be cleared by scything or strimming and the cut material added to the compost heap. The remaining surface weed should then be dug-in and where perennial weed roots can be identified these should be dug out. If you are unsure, ask a neighbouring plotholder. Topsoil should never be removed.

If you are not planting immediately, once a section has been dug over, use a compost or leaf mould mulch to about 75mm thick or a porous polythene membrane. Either method will help to suppress annual weed growth. **You must not use carpet.**

See Section 7 for information on making compost

What to grow?

Choose vegetables you enjoy eating. Consider vegetable types that the family eats a lot of or those that are generally more expensive to buy from a shop. You need only to look around the site to see what can be grown. Ask your Site Secretary or other plot holders what varieties grow best on your allotment site.

The use of a cold frame or greenhouse increases the range of fruit and vegetables you can grow and also extends the growing season, however if you want to use a greenhouse, shed or polytunnel, you must **get permission from the Council** before installation.

Get to know your soil type

If you know your soil conditions you can choose crops that will do well in that particular soil. For instance, root crops will often not grow well in heavy clay soil. Brassicas (cabbage, sprouts, cauliflowers, broccoli, swedes, and turnips) will not grow well in sandy soils.

Allotment plots will have a varying depth of topsoil. Below the topsoil is the subsoil which, in Cardiff, is generally a mix of heavy clays and shale.

Most topsoil on the plots will have had “compost” added to it during its life, but some may not have or may consist of light/heavy clay. This can be improved by adding well rotted manure or compost at different times of the year and in different sections depending on the types of crop you intend to grow.

Allotments are usually used for vegetable and fruit production but can also be used for flowers or grassed areas, all of which will need to be kept in a neat and weed free condition.

Most vegetables will be happy in a neutral or thereabouts soil, (between 6.5 and 7 on the pH scale). The soil type can be checked using a simple testing kit available from most garden or DIY centres. A more acid soil can be achieved by the addition of manure, and an alkaline soil by the addition of lime.

Crops that prefer an **acid** soil include potatoes, carrot, runner beans, blueberry and raspberry. Crops that prefer an **alkaline** soil include cabbage, asparagus, beetroot, chard and strawberry.

Crop rotation

Crop rotation is used to prevent the build up of pests and diseases in the soil. It will also replenish nutrients. Each year the crops should be rotated through each section so eventually the soil throughout the plot is improved but at the same time the conditions meet the requirements of the crop being grown. Divide the plots into 3 sections.

Section 1 - used to grow brassicas (cabbage, sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, swede, radish and turnips).

Section 2 - used for root crops (carrots, parsnip, potatoes, salsify, Jerusalem artichokes and beetroot).

Section 3 - used to grow legumes (peas, beans) or celery, onions, peppers, spinach and sweetcorn.

Section	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year
1	Brassicas	Root Crops	Legumes and Other Crops
2	Root Crops	Legumes and Other Crops	Brassicas
3	Legumes and Other Crops	Brassicas	Root Crops

Fruit

When planning your allotment decide at an early stage whether you are going to grow fruit. There is a wide range of top and soft fruits available and all of them are a long term investment; even Strawberries can be expected to occupy an area for 3 years, but with apples and pears it may be 25 years, therefore the designated area cannot be included in the general rotation and should be treated as a separate garden.

A garden with mainly fruit trees will cast shade on other crops if careful attention is not paid to orientation, therefore your vegetable garden should always be to the south of the fruit.

Green Manure

Green manures are crops sown onto land to maintain its structure and fertility. They can be used at any time of year but are particularly valuable in covering ground over winter, preventing compaction and nutrient loss. As with most things the subject can become very complex.

Some organic gardeners are able to combine green manuring with careful crop rotation and composting in such a way that no additional input of fertilizers and manures are required; to others they may just be an occasional convenience.

Wildlife on Allotments

Allotment sites and plots can be a haven for wildlife. Many sites have hedges and trees around them. Planting of flowers and diverse crops attract insects. Log piles can attract toads and other beneficial insects. Bat, bird, bumble bee, butterfly and ladybird nest boxes can help to increase the population. Even a small shallow area of water can attract newts and frogs and bring an extra pleasure and interest to the plot.

Be aware that pigeons can decimate cabbages and thrushes and blackbirds amongst others enjoy fresh soft fruit, so you will need to protect your crops with netting or fleece.

6.0 GREENHOUSES, SHEDS, POLYTUNNELS AND OTHER STRUCTURES

If you want to place a shed, greenhouse, polytunnel, fruit cage or any other structure on your plot you will need permission from the Council before installation.

If permission is granted, this will be on the understanding that the materials and location of the structure are agreed with your Site Secretary and that the structure should be removed and any damage to the plot made good if the Council subsequently gives notice to remove the structure.

There are strict size limits on structures and certain sites have planning restrictions which must also be respected. Your Site Secretary will be able to advise you about these issues.

Please ask your Site Secretary for an application form. The Site Secretary will complete the form with you, send it to the Council for approval and notify you of the outcome of your application.

7.0 MAINTAINING A HEALTHY PLOT

Composting

Making compost from garden waste is one of the best things you can do. It's easy and costs nothing. It will help you reduce pollution by cutting down on landfill and your plants will grow healthier and look better for it. It will save money on fertilizers too.

Composting ensures that valuable nutrients are returned to the ground and by doing so, completes the cycle – putting back some of what has been taken out. You don't have to be an expert, composting just happens – it's a natural process.

There are a number of proprietary bins and compost makers on the market; however, a simple bin can easily be made from timber. Instructions for construction are available in many gardening books.

A simple free-standing heap (to maximum of 1.2m high and wide) is good enough for the purposes of most plot-holders. It is best to assemble the material in mixed layers. Various additives may be included and spread between layers to "start" the heap e.g. animal manures, nitrogenous fertiliser, or simply a bucket of material from a previous heap.

Moisten the heap during construction. A heap of this size will heat up quickly, reaching its maximum temperature in about a week, and will have cooled-off in about a month; the heap should now be turned, moving the outer layers to the middle, and there will be a second, less intense, heating. The resulting compost will be ready to use in 3 to 6 months from the heap's initial construction.

Couch grass and Bindweed etc. are best sealed, wet, in an opaque plastic bag and allowed to sweat for several months before their decomposing remains are added to the compost heap.

Woody material can be cut or shredded into small pieces and added to the heap or used directly as a mulch.

Allotment water supplies

At the majority of the Council's allotment sites the water supply is turned off during winter months, usually late autumn. This is to protect the underground pipes from frost damage that would otherwise cause very high repair bills. The supply is reconnected in the spring.

The water supply provided at each allotment site is intended for the purposes of horticulture only. Although the supply is of mains water quality the standpipes and water troughs are open to the elements and to contamination from other sources. It is therefore recommended that tenants do not drink water from the supply on the allotment site.

Please report any problems or damage to the water supply to the Council and the Site Secretary.

Collecting rainwater

You can collect rainwater in water tanks on your plot. This will reduce the need to carry water across the site. Water is a precious resource in summer, so use it sparingly. Hosepipes are not permitted to be used.

8.0 ALLOTMENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

- **Chemicals/Pesticides** – should be stored in their original container and used in accordance with the manufacturers' guidelines.
- **Rats, wasps and bees** – Any evidence of these pests should be reported to the Council who will arrange the necessary control
- **First Aid Kit** – It is recommended that you have a first aid kit to hand when working on your plot.
- **Hygiene** – All produce should be thoroughly washed to remove all traces of soil before cooking or eating.
- **Asbestos** – No asbestos should be used in any form on your allotment plot.

Further Information:

Cardiff Council Parks Services

King George V Drive East, Heath Park, CARDIFF CF14 4EP
Tel: (029)20684000
E-mail: parks@cardiff.gov.uk
www.cardiff.gov.uk/parks

Cardiff Allotment Holders Association

Mrs Dawn Gibbens, Chairman
Tel No: (029)20362176

Garden Organic (HDRA)

Garden Organic, Ryton, COVENTRY CV8 3LG
Tel No : 02476 303517
www.gardenorganic.org.uk

Local Libraries have many books on vegetable and fruit growing.

The Allotments and Gardens Council (UK)

7 Mattingly Road, Hempshill Vale, NOTTINGHAM NG6 7BD
Tel No: (01159)276860
www.theallotmentsandgardenscounciluk.org.uk

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd

O'Dell House, Hunters Road, CORBY, Northants NN17 5JE
Tel No: (01536)266576
www.nsalg.org.uk

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