

The History of Allotments

Allotments have been around for a long time; their origins were about providing a piece of land that could be used for poor workers to grow food to feed their family. The field patterns of parts of the Shire counties still show evidence of ridges and furrows from the Furlong – strips of land provided by the Lord of the Manor, cultivated in medieval times by the families of his villagers to grow subsistence crops.



Following the Enclosures of the eighteenth century, much common land was lost and, to compensate poor agricultural workers, land was set aside to cultivate [allotted to them] to provide a good way of alleviating rural poverty and their creation became official government policy in 1845. By 1873 there were 242,000 allotments – one for every three agricultural workers in England. The size of an allotment dates from this history – as being a size sufficient to provide food for a family of four – and was measured as square poles, rods, or perches. A traditional allotment was 10 square poles [which equates to a plot of 250 sq. metres].

With the move to the cities and growing industrialisation, most new allotments were created for the benefit of urban labourers – not so much for toiling to provide for their impoverished family but to provide the working man the chance to be out in the fresh air and escape the noise and drudgery of their factories and workshops.

The allotment for whatever reason had become firmly fixed in Government policies with a succession of Acts of Parliament which still today govern all allotments provided by Local Authorities in terms of their provision, size and what can be done with them – which is why you are asked to sign a tenancy agreement, and accept a binding set of rules and regulations.

Why cultivate an allotment?



Here are some of the benefits of cultivating an allotment...



- Relaxation/stress relief – what better way to unwind than to spend some time gardening, away from the stresses of modern life?
- Fresh air and exercise – gardening is recommended as an excellent form of exercise for people of all ages and abilities.
- Fresh produce – home-grown crops are always far tastier than those bought in the shops, and at a fraction of the price. Why not grow your own 5 a day?
- Organic produce – there is real concern about the possibility of chemical residues in food. Cultivating your allotment organically can ensure that your vegetables are chemical free.
- GM-free food – be sure that the food you eat is free of genetically modified product!
- Community groups and allotment associations – allotments are a great way of meeting other like-minded people from right across the community. If you wish, you could set up or get involved in an allotment association.

- Herbs, fruit and flowers – allotments are not just about straight rows of vegetables. Many tenants grow flowers, fruit, herbs and spices, to get the most out of their allotment.
- No garden? - For people without a garden at home, their allotment is their garden and many tenants fill their plot with plantings as if it were their own garden!
- The policy of the Parish Council is to encourage organic and environmentally sensitive gardening on

their allotments but there is no directive that you must. However, organic gardening is seen to have benefits. Organic gardening increases the healthy benefits of cultivation by ensuring the vegetables you produce and eat are free of chemical residues in the following ways:

- Organic gardeners avoid using artificial fertilizers and pesticides that may harm wildlife, and people too. There is a strong organic gardening movement throughout the country and locally.
- Organic gardening is all about improving the natural health of your soil, and about controlling pests and diseases by natural methods, such as companion planting, which attracts predators.
- It is well known that strong, healthy plants are less susceptible to pests and diseases than those which have been overfed on artificial fertilisers.
- Chemical fertilisers such as slug pellets can kill so many other animals and birds, it is important to try to find other methods of protecting plants that are less damaging to the natural environment – see Wildlife on Allotments.
- Composting your own organic allotment and household waste on your allotment also helps provide a healthy organic substitute for chemical and artificial fertilisers.

If you do choose to use chemicals on your allotment you must use them safely and you must ensure they do not impact on your neighbours, who may be gardening organically.



Starting Up



Before you start cultivating your new allotment, you will need to plan how much time and money you have to spend and, if necessary, consider what help and other resources you may need. Taking on an allotment does take a lot of commitment to initially clear and subsequently manage. Depending on the size of the plot, you will need to put in an average of at least a couple of hours a week to effectively manage it, although this will vary between summer and winter and on the type of crops grown.

A plot may be very overgrown when you take it on, so you may have to spend a lot of time gradually clearing and digging it during the first season, or maybe get some friends to help you!

Before you start, remember to check the Health and Safety hints in these pages.

- On your first visit to your plot, decide what work you need to do to bring it back to cultivation. Adapt your gardening to your abilities and the amount of time you can spend.



- Digging the soil is one of the most physically demanding activities in gardening, as it involves continual bending and straightening of the back while lifting a spadeful of soil. Do a little at a time to prevent back problems.
- In a new plot, or a plot neglected for several years, digging the soil over thoroughly before planting is important. If the previous gardener looked after the plot well, you can probably use a fork or spade to hand dig the soil. Digging is important as it loosens the earth, letting air and moisture in and breaking up hard compacted earth – but take it easy with the hard labour, and do a little at a time.

- If the plot is overgrown with long grass or weeds such as brambles you may need to use a strimmer or hedge clippers to cut them down.
- On new land, such as Mithian, soil pests, particularly wire worms may be a problem. No chemicals are effective but constant digging exposes them for the birds - introducing nematode predators may be an effective biological control.
- Remember to inform the Parish Clerk or Allotment Association if you are unable to clear your plot immediately for any reason, or you could risk losing your plot!
- On weedy plots, plant large leafed crops such as potatoes, courgettes or runner beans, as these will smother weeds.
- You will still need to remove weeds regularly to prevent your crops being overrun by weeds during the first months of cultivation.
- Some people prefer to use methods of cultivation that do not involve digging. Mulches of compost or thick polythene are perfectly acceptable, as are green manures on fallow ground.
- The best time for digging is autumn or early winter if you want to be ready for seed sowing in spring. If you dig in compost, manure or the remnants of last year's crop, worms and micro-organisms will break it down over the winter.
- If you are not an experienced gardener, feel free to ask neighbours for advice – allotment gardening should also be a social event.



Tools and Equipment

If you have no tools, start by buying only the essentials first – spade, fork, hoe, rake, and trowel.



- If you cannot afford brand new tools, it may be possible to buy old or reconditioned tools from auctions, market stalls, car boot sales or other gardeners.
- Both fork and spade are in constant use and should be as solid and strong as possible.
- The fork is used for raking and spreading compost, for harvesting vegetables, for digging and the removal of roots of perennial weeds.

- The spade is used for cutting edges, winter digging, making trenches and for emptying the compost heap.
- The rake is used for breaking down and levelling roughly dug earth to make a fine seedbed. It is also useful for gathering together debris such as weeds and hedge clippings.
- A wheelbarrow is essential for moving heavy or bulky material.
- Using water butts that are set-up to collect rainwater from sheds or other structures is a good way of saving on water consumption and a way to ensure you have your own supply.
- A watering can is important, as the use of hosepipes and sprinklers for watering crops on allotments is forbidden.

Legal Stuff

As we have indicated, a lot to do with allotments is governed by law, not just the whims of the Parish Council or an Allotment Association if you form one. If you take an allotment you will be entering into a legally binding contract and you must abide by the ‘rules and regulations’. If you do not, you will be at risk of losing your allotment.



The Parish Council does not require you to take out insurance [unless you keep Bees] – but to put your mind at rest you might want to check out your insurance situation. Public Liability Insurance is not expensive and will protect you in respect of personal liability [if anyone gets injured in connection with your allotment or your gardening activity].

If you have a shed or greenhouse you might be covered on your ‘homes’ policy – check with your insurance company – if not they may, for a small sum include it as a risk.

A summary of what you can do on your allotment – A Guide

Allotments have their own legislation which dictates how allotments should be used and most of ‘do’s and don’ts’ in this document are legal requirements. Failure to abide by these rules and regulations may mean you are breaking the law. The requirements are formally laid down in a tenancy agreement which will set down your responsibilities as a plot holder. Basically these are the ‘do’s and ‘don’ts’.

Do's

- You can plant herbs and flowers
- If your site has gates you MUST always ensure you lock them behind you
- You can bring your dog on site as long as it’s kept on a lead at all times
- You MUST erect a clearly visible number board on your plot
- If you have fruit bushes, etc. you MUST maintain the area around them
- You must cultivate your plot and keep it free from weeds – cultivation = 2/3 at all times either in crop or ready to accept crop.
- If you have a shed on your allotment you must maintain it in a serviceable condition
- You MUST pay your allotment rent within 14 days of receiving an invoice
- If you vacate your plot you must pay any rent owed
- Always inform the Parish Clerk if you change address and/or telephone number



- Permit entry to sheds/structures for allotment staff at any time requested
- If you vacate your plot you MUST remove all belongings within two weeks

Don'ts

- You are not allowed to sublet your plot
- You are not allowed to use your plot for any trade or business
- You are not allowed to bring onto or use carpets on allotment plots
- You are not allowed to bring rubbish onto the site – you may be charged for its removal
- You are not allowed to block communal pathways
- You are not allowed to wash crops or tools in water troughs
- You are not allowed to use a hosepipe or a sprinkler to water crops
- You are not allowed to have smoky bonfires that cause a nuisance, or leave fires unattended
- You are not allowed to cause a nuisance to other plot holders or neighbouring householders – nuisance could include bad language, getting drunk, playing loud music, racist language, etc.
- You are not allowed to go onto other people's plots unless they have given you permission
- If you have children or young people with you on site they are not allowed to wander around or make a mess
- You are not allowed to dig up paths between plots
- You are not allowed to use any form of violence on-site, be it physical or verbal
- You are not allowed to transfer your tenancy
- You are not allowed to give the code to the gate lock to other people or allow them to visit your plot unsupervised



Sheds

Sheds are permitted, the limit for the shed is 6' x 6' and should be of a commercial type of sound construction and must be kept in a good state of order. We suggest if wooden it should be treated/painted/stained at least every 3 years. If you have a particular need for a larger shed you can make an application to the Parish Council. PLEASE DO NOT just erect a shed without permission.

Greenhouses

If you want to make the most of your gardening, growing plants under glass is essential. A greenhouse may be erected with permission on your plot. Again, it should be of a commercial type and preferably made using Perspex/polycarbonates [for safety reasons]. Several types are available from commercial manufacturers and are no more expensive than glass. Greenhouses should ideally be no more than about 9 sq. metres. If you have particular needs for a larger greenhouse you can make an application to the Parish Council. If you do have a shed and/or greenhouse, try to use guttering to store rainwater in water butts to lessen the need to use tap water in watering your plants.



Poly tunnels are not permitted on your allotment. Net tunnels are permitted providing they do not fall into disrepair or will have to be removed.

Cold Frames

These are a good way of getting extended growing on your allotment. Try to use structures that do not use glass.

Fruit Cages

If you decide to grow soft fruits it is advisable to protect them using a cage – birds love strawberries as much as you and will always be up earlier to get the best fruit. If you do use fruit cages please use ‘standard’ commercial size.

Trees

Trees are difficult! Allotments are for food so ornamental trees really have no place on an allotment. What about fruit trees? These too, can cause a problem in that some could easily grow to 12-20 feet and would cause problems for neighbouring plot holders. However, cordon grown or dwarf rootstock fruit trees that are managed to 5/6 feet can be planted.

Wildlife on Allotments – Think Green – Think Environmentally Sensitive!

Some growers may still regard wildlife as ‘the enemy’ imagining legions of furry, feathered, slimy and shelled pests with their beady eyes fixed on carrots, strawberries and prizewinning marrows!! It is true that left uncontrolled, many creatures can play havoc with a crop – but for every ‘pest’ there is usually at least one predator species ready to step in and tackle it on your behalf. Attracting beneficial wildlife can be quite straightforward.



The key to getting wildlife to work with you is to look after the beneficial creatures that already live on your allotment, and to encourage more, and different ones to settle there. Perhaps the easiest way of conserving wildlife is to reduce your use of toxic chemicals [ideally cutting them out altogether]. Many toxic chemicals found in pesticides are non-specific and are just as likely to kill friend as well as foe. If you are not careful you get into a cycle of having to use more and more sprays to check an invasion of pests as you have killed the natural predators that would have helped you.

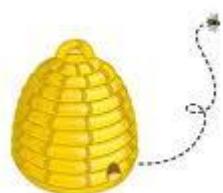
As well as cutting down on chemicals perhaps you could create habitats on your plot that attract the ‘right kind’ of creature or discourage the pest. Check out companion planting using specific plants that discourage pests, such as old English Marigolds and Tansy.

Bees on Allotments



Bees are not permitted to be kept on individual plots as they can be a hazard, a nuisance, or even dangerous to your neighbour. However, bees do have positive advantages, and the honey bee plays a vital role in crop pollination not just for our food but also for that of many other plants and animals in the ecosystem – and of course, the bi-product is wonderful honey.

In recent years because of the increasing prevalence of disease and predation, honey bee populations have suffered and Defra is keen to support bee keeping and see the



increase of beekeeping on allotment sites. To this end, and following advice from 'Friends of the Bee' a separate area has been set aside on the Mithian site where allotment holders can site hives, subject to taking on a separate tenancy with a strict set of conditions following advice from The British Beekeepers Association.

Composts and Manures on Allotments

The most important part of your allotment is the soil, and the most important factor governing your success or failure as a gardener is the soil's condition. Soil is a living, changing structure and its health is dependent, as with all living things, on air, water, food and warmth. Healthy soil is teeming with life – a



handful will contain millions of living creatures. The larger ones you can see – worms, insects, millipedes and so on, all play their part, but it is the invisible creatures – the soil's micro-organisms that are of the greatest importance. Without the bacteria in soil it would not support plant life. All these creatures need plenty of organic matter to survive – organic matter can be introduced into your soil by using composts and manures.



Composts: well made garden composts are an excellent source of organic material. All green kitchen and garden waste [except the roots of perennial weeds] can be used to build up a compost heap. As a rule do not use any weeds which have been treated with weed killer. The plant material will gradually rot down and can then be introduced to your allotment by digging in or use used as mulch between or around growing plants. You can construct your own compost 'bins' or purchase ready-made composters. The best compost is made from a mixture of different organic materials together with the addition of the organic chemicals to aid the break down into compost. To many gardeners compost making becomes a bit of an art.

Please do not use food waste on your compost as this can attract rats. A good way of using food waste is in a wormery – these are purpose made [not to attract rats] and the product can be introduced to your soil – worms are good to improve soil structure.



Manures: Adding farmyard manure can contribute to soil structure and fertility when mixed into the soil. It can also be an anti-social activity! If you do have a delivery of manure, please observe the following guidelines:

1. Protect the delivery area and clean up within 7 days.
2. Make sure pathways are cleaned up after.
3. If manure is not dug in immediately cover heap with tarpaulin or sheet of polythene securely fixed to cut down smell [!] and fly problems.

Also, due to recent outbreaks of e-coli 0157 linked to farms in the UK the following advice has been given to the use of manure when growing food crops on allotments –

1. No fresh manure should be applied directly onto the soil – it should have been 'rotted' for at least 12 months before applying.
2. Manure should be thoroughly dug into the ground and left for at least two months before planting crops – particularly root crops.



3. Hands should be washed, preferably using anti-bacterial soap following handling manure.
4. All crops grown on manured land should be washed.
5. Particular care should be taken that young children should not be allowed to handle animal manure.

!! Contaminated Manure – know where your manure is from – ask the stables or farm if hay is used in feeding their animals or the pasture has been treated with FOREFRONT because it contains a herbicide called Aminopyralid which can find its way into manure. To find out more, visit www.farmgarden.org.uk

Green Manuring: another good way of increasing the amount of organic material in the soil is by green manuring – a quick growing cheap crop such as mustard, rape, clover or lupins [not the decorative ones] sown preferably in the early Autumn and dug into the ground a few weeks later while still green. Field beans, Lupins and clover also can enrich the soil with nitrogen from their roots. Green manuring as well as adding structure and nutrients to your soil has the added advantage that they can suppress weed growth. A wide range of green manure seed and advice can be found at www.greenmanure.co.uk

What can I grow?

Allotments by law are plots of land for the production of food – so you will principally be expected to use your allotment to grow vegetables and fruit [subject to certain restrictions concerning fruit trees]. However, a small amount of herbs and flowers may be grown. To help you decide what and how much to grow please see the chart below [with apologies to experienced gardeners!]

Vegetable sowing calendar – a planting table to help you make the most of your plot:

Name	Time to sow	When ready	Remarks	Expected Yield from a 3m row
Artichoke, Globe	Plant March and April, 2-3ft apart	June to October	These do not bear well the first year; the flower head bracts can be eaten.	32 heads
Artichoke, Jerusalem	Plant February to March in rows 3 feet apart	November to March		14 Kg
Asparagus	Plant April, 15 inches apart	Three years after sowing	Care must be given during the first few years, then it will bear prolifically for many seasons	4 Kg
Bean, Broad	Sow November to April 2-3ft between double rows	June and July	Need well-manured soil	4 Kg
Bean, Dwarf French	Sow May in rows 18in-2ft apart	June and July	Very early and late crops must be sown under glass.	4 Kg
Bean, Runner	May and June, rows 6-8ft apart	July to Oct	Early crops should be sown in boxes and planted out in June	20 Kg double row
Beetroot	Sow April to July, rows 4-5ft apart	Late autumn to October	Beet will grow on any soil; animal manure must be kept from the roots.	4 Kg

Broccoli, Autumn Broccoli, Winter Broccoli, Spring Broccoli, Summer	Sow March to May. Plant May to July, 12-15in apart	September to June	All plants should be transplanted as soon as possible.	4 Kg
Brussels Sprouts	Sow March and April in rows 2-3ft apart. Plant May and June.	September to April	Should be picked after frosts. Do not cut tops until stalks have completely ripened.	5 Kg
Cabbage (spring sown)	Plant early August	September to February	Requires a well-manured soil in good position. Should be hoed occasionally	2 – 4 Kg
Cabbage (autumn sown)	March to May rows 18-24 inches apart	May to July	Requires a well-manured soil in good position. Should be hoed occasionally	5 – 6 Kg
Carrot	Sow March to early August	June onwards. In October lift and store in ashes.	Requires a well-cultivated soil.	2 – 4 Kg
Cauliflower (spring sown / autumn sown)	Plant April to July, or September to February with 24-30 inches between rows	All year		5 Kg
Celery	April, sow in rows four feet apart	August to October	Preferably grown in well watered trenches	5 Kg
Chicory	Sow March, plant May 12in between rows	October to February	Blanch leaves by lifting plants and standing in a cool place in fine damp soil.	10 heads
Courgettes	Sow indoors April - May	July - October	Plant out late May/June	7 – 10 Kg
Cucumber (outdoor)	Sow May, four feet between rows	August to September	Requires plenty of manure and moisture.	14 Kg
Endive	Sow April, 12-15 inches between rows	June to October	Blanch by covering plants with flower-pots, three weeks before use.	8 heads
Leek	Sow February and March Plant out May or June, 18 inches between rows	Can be left in ground until required for use in winter	Large specimens required plenty of manure. Blanch by covering with collars of brown paper	5 – 6 Kg
Lettuce	Sow March, with succession sowing throughout the summer	June onwards	Moisture promotes rapid growth which is necessary. Soil should be prepared some time before planting	10 heads
Onion (Spring)	Sow under glass in Feb. Plant out in May, 9-12in between rows	September - finished off in dry open shed	Can be hung up and kept a winter in a dry place	2 Kg
Onion (Winter)	Sow in August, set out in February	June to October	Useful for supplementing spring-sown stock	5 – 6 Kg
Parsley	Sow March to July, 12 inches between rows	All year round		-
Parsnip	Sow February and March, 18 inches between rows	November to March		5 Kg

Pea (early)	Sow February and March	June		5 Kg
Pea (second early)	Sow March and April	June and July		5 Kg
Pea (maincrop)	Sow April to June	July to September	Deeply dug and well manured. A mulch will help to retain moisture in latest sown crops.	5 Kg
Potato (early)	Plant March, 18 inches between rows	June	Potatoes should be sprouted before being planted.	5 Kg
Potato (maincrop)	Plant April, 18-36 inches between rows	July, August and on	Soot is beneficial to the crop.	10 Kg
Pumpkin	Sow indoors April	September - October		7 Kg
Radish	Sow March to September	All year round		2.5 Kg
Radish (winter)	Sow June to August	All year round		3 Kg
Rhubarb	Plant spring and autumn, 3-4ft between rows	April - July		-
Seakale	Plant March and April, 30 inches between rows	In November lift and store in moist sand		4 Kg
Shallot	February and March, 9-12 inches between rows	Lift in July when top withers and store until required	Will grow in any soil	3 Kg
Spinach (summer)	Sow February to August	May to January		1.5 Kg
Spinach (winter)	July to September 12-15 inches between rows	May to January		3 Kg
Spinach (perpetual)	April to July, 12 inches between rows	May to January		3 Kg
Squash	Sow indoors April	September to October		12 Kg
Swede	Sow April to July 15 inches between rows	October to March		5 Kg
Tomato (indoor)	Sow January to March under glass	May to October		10 Kg
Tomato (outdoor)	Plant out in May, 18-24in between rows	August to October		variable
Turnip	Sow March to August, 12-15 inches between rows	July to November	For "tops" sow in September and leave un-thinned	4 Kg
Vegetable Marrow	Sow March , 4-5 feet between rows	July to November	Allow plenty of moisture for manure	14 Kg

Health and Safety Hints

Gardening should be healthy! Cultivating an allotment can be hazardous. Please bear the following hints in mind when you are on site.



- Hard physical work, lifting heavy or awkward loads requires care, practice and an understanding of your own capabilities and physical limitations, particularly if you are not used to it!
- Digging is one of the most physically demanding tasks in gardening, as it involves continued bending and straightening of the back when lifting a spade of soil. It needs to be approached with care. For your back's sake, do not rush your digging.
- Machinery – if you are using power mowers or strimmers, remember that you are responsible, as an allotment tenant, for the safety of other tenants and visitors.
- Bonfires are allowed on the allotment site providing they do not cause a nuisance – see rules.
- Broken glass and other materials may be hazardous if left on your allotment. Please remove.
- 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. Make sure that you have a vaccination that can protect you against the disease. Ask Your GP.
- Garden tools can be a hazard if they are not stored properly or are left lying around the plot when not in use.
- Chemicals must be kept securely locked in their own cupboard in your shed, in clearly marked containers. Do not keep them in lemonade bottles or other food containers or leave them lying around your plot. If you must use slug pellets and other chemicals, please keep them to your own plot and do not put them on your neighbour's plot. They may garden organically and will not thank you for it! Follow manufacturer's instructions to the letter.



- Rats can carry Weil's disease via their urine. Any evidence of rats on your allotment should be reported to the Parish Clerk or Allotment Association who will arrange appropriate control.
- A first aid kit is always a wise addition to the tools kept in the garden shed. A small selection of adhesive plasters, antiseptic ointments, a pair of tweezers for removing thorns and splinters and a gauze or lint pad to use as a compress to stop the bleeding if you are badly cut.
- Children are very welcome on the allotments, providing they do not cause nuisance to other allotment holders. Their welfare and health and safety are the responsibility of their parents/carers at all times whilst on the site.

Above all, enjoy your allotment and we hope this pamphlet will be of some use, particularly to novice gardeners!

Essential telephone numbers and useful Websites.

St. Agnes Parish Council.

Parish Clerk	Mrs Sue Herman	01872 553801
Administration Assistant	Mrs Annette Tippett	01872 553588

Allotment Association

To be set up.

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Secretary

Webpages

www.farmgarden.org.uk	The allotment regeneration initiative – working with all
www.gadenaction.co.uk	Good general information and advice for allotment gardening.
www.digmyplot.co.uk	Good general information and advice for allotment gardening.
www.gardenorganic.org.uk	Good general information and advice for allotment gardening.
www.allotments-uk.com	Good general information and advice for allotment gardening.
www.nsallag.org.uk	National Society of Allotments. Good information and legal stuff.
www.greenmanure.co.uk	Information on green manuring, plus links to good seed sites.
www.wrap.org.uk	Click link to “home composting” gives easy to use comprehensive guide to making compost – very useful.
www.garden4less .	Comprehensive shopping site for allotment holder’s requirements.
www.waltons.co.uk –	Range of greenhouse using polycarbonate instead of glass.

Fact sheets

These are available to read at the Parish Council Office, and can also be found on farmgarden.org.uk – Allotment Regeneration Initiative.

Promote the Plot – Promotional ideas for allotment associations.

Project Allotment – A guide for groups and agencies working on allotments. Resources/Publication list.

Fundraising for allotment associations. – List of grant schemes/useful contacts for fundraising.

Safe Sites – Tackling vandalism and other offences on allotment sites. – Resources list/websites.

Health and Safety on allotments – A management guide. Also list of useful organisations/publications.

Affordable toilets for allotments. – Information and list of resources

With every **ALLOTMENT** plot you get:

ALLOT of things to do in your spare time

ALLOT more control of what goes into the produce you eat

ALLOT of healthy outdoor activity

ALLOT of fun for all ages and abilities

And what is more – it doesn’t cost **ALLOT**