

## **APPENDIX 4 – GUIDANCE FOR NEW & EXISTING ALLOTMENT HOLDERS**

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This information relates to local authority guidelines and outline best practice information for allotment holders, describing and offering support regarding allotment issues and benefits.

### **Why Cultivate an Allotment**

Here are some of the great 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 city living?
- 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. (Please be aware that not all allotments are organic.)
- GM-free food - be sure that the food you eat is free of genetically modified product!
- Community groups and allotments associations - allotments are a great way of meeting other like-minded people from right across the community. If you wish, you could get involved in your allotment association.
- Open spaces - along with our parks and open spaces, allotment sites form the "green lungs" of the city. By cultivating an allotment you will be helping to ensure their preservation well into the future.
- Wildlife - a working allotment can be a wildlife haven, with foxes, badgers, slow-worms, birds and a host of other wildlife living right in the middle of the city.
- 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 and features as if it was their own garden!
- To work to achieve environmental sustainability.

### **A Beginners Guide to Allotments**

#### **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 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 on 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

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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.
- Remember to inform the Allotments Team if you are unable to work 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, which 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.
- Specific plots that are unsuitable for letting as vegetable plots may be given permission for use as orchard plots. Contact the Allotments Team about this.
- If you are not an experienced gardener, feel free to ask your site rep or plot neighbours for advice or the Allotment Team.

### **Basic Do's and Don'ts**

Allotments have their own legislation which dictates how allotments should be used and most of the do's and don'ts on this document are legal requirements. Failure to abide by these requirements means you could be breaking the law!

#### **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, and clear up any faeces
- You can have a small lawned area as long as it's regularly mown
- You **MUST** erect a clearly visible number board on your plot
- If you have fruit bushes/trees, etc, you **MUST** maintain the area around them and make sure they are pruned regularly
- You must cultivate at least 50% of your plot and keep the rest free from weeds and cut any long grass
- If you have a shed on your plot you must maintain it in a serviceable condition
- You **MUST** pay your allotment rent with 40 days of receiving an invoice
- If you vacate your plot you must pay any rent owed
- Always inform the Allotments Team if you change address
- 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
- Please be considerate to other plot holders

#### **Don'ts**

- You are not allowed to keep poultry, animals or any livestock on any plot that is owned or leased by West Lothian Council
- 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 rubbish onto the site - you may be charged for its removal
- You are not allowed to block communal pathways/haulingways

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- 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 (see Bonfire guidelines)
  - 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 on other plots 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 give your key to other people or allow them to visit your plot unsupervised
  - You must obtain written permission to erect a shed
  - You must obtain written permission to have poultry on a plot
  - You must have written permission to plant fruit trees, trees or large shrubs
  - It is advisable Not to bring old carpets onto site, as they can be difficult to get rid of and they are known to contaminate the soil.

### **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.

### **Health and Safety Hints**

Cultivating an allotment can be hazardous. Please bear the following hints in mind when you are on site:

- Hard physical work or 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 task 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 our allotment sites providing they do not cause a nuisance.
- Broken glass and other materials may be hazardous if left on your allotment.

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- Ponds can encourage wildlife, but ensure that they have shallow sloping sides so that children (and wildlife) are less likely to fall in. A barrier or markers will ensure that a pond overgrown with weeds and algae will be more visible and less hazardous.
  - 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. Your GP may be able to help.
  - 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!
  - Rats can carry Weil's Disease via their urine. Any evidence of rats on your allotment should be reported to Allotments Team who will arrange appropriate control.
  - First aid kit is always a wise addition to the tools kept in the garden shed. A small selection of adhesive plasters, antiseptic ointment, 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.

### **Using Pesticides**

Pesticides are primarily chemical substances prepared or used to destroy harmful pests. By their very nature pesticides pose a potential hazard to the user, others in the area during and after use, and can have a bad effect on the environment if used incorrectly.

The actual risk can be reduced by the careful choice of pesticide, the time and methods of use, weather conditions and the knowledge of the person using the pesticide. Chemical pesticides should only be used as a last resort.

#### **Pesticides include:**

- weedkillers (herbicides)
- agents to kill fungal growth (fungicides)
- insect killers (insecticides),
- rodent (rat) bait (rodenticides),
- soil treatments
- wood preservatives

and a number of other preparations. It is always wise to check before buying and using.

Pesticides are used by members of the public, often in the garden, and the potential hazard can be the same as for pesticides used in agriculture and other large scale operations.

Pesticides used by the public are likely to have been obtained from the local garden centre or hardware store, and be approved, with information on the label.

Please ensure that you read all the information on the label.

You need to know how you can protect yourself, others, children and animals, and how to safeguard our environment.

#### **Before selecting a pesticide consider the following:**

- Always identify the pest before any treatment is applied.
- Do you really need a pesticide?
- Can the problem be solved by changing environmental conditions, for example cleaning up or preventing damp?

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- Is there a way to deal with the pest without using a pesticide, for example using a hoe or hand fork, cultivation or catch and trap?
  - Chemical pesticides may often kill beneficial organisms which help to keep pests under control.

**If a pesticide is to be used take account of the following:**

- Pesticide sprays based on fatty acids are effective, relatively safe and environmentally friendly.
- Pesticides based on synthetic pyrethroids are generally less toxic than many others.
- Pesticides containing organophosphorous chemicals (-pos) are potentially hazardous because of their effect on the nervous system and are to be avoided where possible.
- Water based wood preservatives are a good choice when animals occupy the adjoining area or plants are growing nearby.
- Always seek professional help with a problem with rodents (rats).

**How can I be safe?**

- Always read the label when selecting a pesticide.
- Always follow the instructions exactly.
- Always wear impervious gloves when using pesticides and wash your hands immediately after use.
- Always wash off splashes as soon as they occur.
- Always store pesticides in a safe place, out of reach of children, and always keep in their original container.
- Never use a pesticide in wet and windy conditions and avoid spray drifting off the target area.
- Never eat, drink or smoke when handling a pesticide.
- Never use pesticides in a confined space.
- Never use pesticides near food and food preparation.
- Never reuse an empty container.

Always take care with the disposal of pesticides, working solutions and empty.

**Best of all do not use a pesticide**

**Manure Deliveries**

Manure can be accepted onto the sites with vehicle access. Nevertheless, care must be taken not to cause damage to facilities on the site or neighbouring plots. Manure should not be left across access paths to block vehicle or pedestrian access. It will be removed by the council if it causes an obstruction.

Adding farmyard manure and garden compost can contribute small amounts of nutrients. It can, when mixed into the soil, attract worms to improve soil structure and stimulate the activity of soil micro-organisms. These break down organic matter and release a balance of nutrients for uptake by plant roots. Organic matter such as leaves or compost also helps to retain moisture and reduce the need for watering.

An alternative to compost heaps is to dig plant remains direct into a trench. Left over the winter months, worms will ensure that it has all disappeared by spring, and improved the soil in the process.

Please note that the council can provide leaves to sites with vehicle access during the autumn, as we are anxious to ensure that they are delivered locally for allotment and garden use rather than transporting them to landfill and other sites.

Please be aware that deliveries may not be possible on some sites with poor vehicle access.

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**Bonfire Guidelines****THINK****Before you light up**

- 1) Do you really need a bonfire, all green waste can be composted, have two compost areas for fast and slower rotting waste.
- 2) It is an offence to create smoke which becomes a nuisance. You can be prosecuted under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 also the Highways Act 1980 if smoke drifts across a road endangering traffic.
- 3) Bonfires can be dangerous and care should be taken when children are around, keep a look out for wild animals and pets in a bonfire before you light it.
- 4) All green waste can be composted and this will effectively convert it into valuable compost and thereby eliminating the need for a bonfire.
- 5) If you feel that you have waste that cannot be burned or composted, it can be taken to the local Civic Amenity site to be recycled free of charge for domestic householders.

**THINK****Before you light up**

- 1) Always be considerate to other allotment holders and surrounding houses when starting a bonfire.
- 2) Make sure all green material has been well dried before it is burnt, this reduces the amount of smoke produced.
- 3) Make sure that the wind will not blow smoke onto or towards nearby plot holders and surrounding houses.
- 4) Do not light on windless or damp days as the smoke will linger at lower levels thereby penetrating houses and polluting the air we breathe.
- 5) Do not leave the fire unattended or leave it burning overnight, stay with the fire at all times.
- 6) Do not burn plastics household waste, tyres or anything containing foam, paint or chemicals.

**Vegetable sowing guide****A planting table to help you make the most of your plot:**

Name	Time to sow	When ready	Remarks
Artichoke, Globe	Plant March and April, 2-3ft apart	June to October	These do not bear well the first year; the flowerhead bracts can be eaten.
Artichoke, Jerusalem	Plant February to March in rows 3 feet apart	November to March	
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
Bean, Broad	Sow November to April 2-3ft between double rows	June and July	Need well-manured soil
Bean, Dwarf French	Sow May in rows 18in-2ft apart	June and July	Very early and late crops must be sown under glass.
Bean,	May and June, rows 6-8ft	July to Oct	Early crops should be sown in

Runner	apart		boxes and planted out in June
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.
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.
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.
Cabbage (spring sown)	Plant early August	September to February	Requires a well-manured soil in good position. Should be hoed occasionally
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
Carrot	Sow March to early August	June onwards. In October lift and store in ashes.	Requires a well-cultivated soil.
Cauliflower (spring sown / autumn sown)	Plant April to July, or September to February with 24-30 inches between rows	All year	
Celery	April, sow in rows four feet apart	August to October	Preferably grown in well watered trenches
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.
Courgettes	Sow indoors April - May	July - October	Plant out late May/June
Cucumber (outdoor)	Sow May, fourfeet between rows	August to September	Requires plenty of manure and moisture.
Endive	Sow April, 12-15 inches between rows	June to October	Blanch by covering plants with flower-pots, three weeks before use.
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
Lettuce	Sow March, with successional sowing	June onwards	Moisture promotes rapid growth which is necessary. Soil should be prepared some time before



	throughout the summer		planting
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
Onion (Winter)	Sow in August, set out in February	June to October	Useful for supplementing spring-sown stock
Parsley	Sow March to July, 12 inches between rows	All year round	
Parsnip	Sow February and March, 18 inches between rows	November to March	
Pea (early)	Sow February and March	June	
Pea (second early)	Sow March and April	June and July	
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.
Potato (early)	Plant March, 18 inches between rows	June	Potatoes should be sprouted before being planted.
Potato (maincrop)	Plant April, 18-36 inches between rows	July, August and on	Soot is beneficial to the crop.
Pumpkin	Sow indoors April	September - October	
Radish	Sow March to September	All year round	
Radish (winter)	Sow June to August	All year round	
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	
Shallot	February and March, 9-12 inches between rows	Lift in July when top withers and store until required	Will grow in any soil
Spinach (summer)	Sow February to August	May to January	
Spinach (winter)	July to September 12-15 inches between rows	May to January	

Spinach (perpetual)	April to July, 12 inches between rows	May to January	
Squash	Sow indoors April	September to October	
Swede	Sow April to July 15 inches between rows	October to March	
Tomato (indoor)	Sow January to March under glass	May to October	
Tomato (outdoor)	Plant out in May, 18-24in between rows	August to October	
Turnip	Sow March to August, 12- 15 inches between rows	July to November	For "tops" sow in September and leave unthinned
Vegetable Marrow	Sow March , 4-5 feet between rows	July to November	Allow plenty of moisture for manure