

Streatley Allotments Society: Plot Holders' Guide

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1) Introduction:

This guide is aimed to help Streatley Allotments Society (SAS) plot holders. It covers the responsibilities of all plot holders together with the general rules on plot usage. It supplements but does not replace nor rescind any of the obligations entered into in the plot holder's Tenancy Agreement with SAS.

2) Dos and Don'ts for plot holders:

A plot holder is required to:-

- (a) Cultivate the allotment properly, keeping it free from weeds, tidy, and trimming any hedges on it;
- (b) Display the number of the allotment plot clearly within the allotment plot;
- (c) On leaving the Allotment Site lock any gates that are not required to be used by other plot holders still on the Allotment Site, having ascertained who else is working on the Allotment Site, and checking with them which gates they will be using when they leave, thus ensuring that other ploholders are not locked in the site and that site gates are left locked when not required for egress by others within the Allotment Site.
- (d) Use water sparingly. Water troughs are provided on the Allotment Site for use by plot holders. The use of hosepipes or sprinklers is not permitted;
- (e) Compost and recycle as much as possible except materials which could attract or encourage vermin or harbour disease or pests within the Allotment Site;
- (f) Remove non-compostable waste (twigs/branches, plant pots, wire ties, plastics, broken canes, broken glass, spoiled produce, etc.) from each individual plot and from the Allotment Site;
- (g) Comply with all legal requirements in respect of hens and rabbits on the Allotment Site. Plot holders must ensure that dogs are kept under control at all times when on the Allotment Site and are kept on a lead when in communal areas;
- (h) Ensure that children are closely supervised at all times when on the Allotment Site;
- (i) Contribute effort to site working parties when run. Attendance at each working party is not mandatory but ploholders are encouraged to attend and help at a reasonable number each year. Communal efforts to maintain the Allotment Site mean that the costs of engaging external contractors for routine maintenance can be kept as low as possible (with resulting impact on plot rents).

A plot holder must not:-

- (a) Cause a nuisance, damage, or annoyance to other allotment plot holders, neighbouring properties, or residents in the nearby areas – nuisance could include bad or racist language, getting drunk, playing loud music, allowing weeds to grow uncontrolled and set seed or permitting diseased crops to grow, thus affecting neighbouring plots etc.;
- (b) Obstruct any paths or roadways that have been set out for the access to or within the Allotment Site;
- (c) Erect fencing to individual plots greater than 1m in height or use barbed wire on or around any allotment plot;

- (d) Construct hen or rabbit houses larger than 2x1m square and more than 1.5m high.
- (e) Use hen or rabbit feeders other than those of a non-spill type to prevent encouraging vermin onto the site.
- (f) Build a shed, greenhouse, polytunnel on an allotment plot without obtaining the prior permission of SAS. Specifically, SAS will require conformity with the following guidelines:
 - the placement of such facilities may only be on the Southern boundary of a plot, directly against an existing hedge line, or located such that they minimise any shadow cast on a neighbouring plot;
 - be placed such that they do not overhang other plots or common access routes nor cause water to run off outside the plot;
 - sheds and other wooden structures shall be painted or stained in an unobtrusive neutral colour (brown, green, dun) and roofing material shall be of a similar dark hue;
 - sheds should be set back at least 2' (600mm) from the boundary of the Allotment Site;
 - maximum shed dimensions must not exceed 7' (2100mm) high and area 8' x 6' (2400mm x 1800mm);
 - no more than two greenhouses and/or polytunnels and no more than one shed may be constructed on a plot;
 - for each greenhouse / polytunnel height must not exceed 7' (2100mm) and area 8' x 10' (2400mm x 3000mm);

The contents of sheds, greenhouses, and polytunnels are not covered against theft or damage under SAS's insurance policy and the contents are entirely at the plot holder's risk;
- (g) Deposit any materials including stone waste, weeds or any type of waste from their plot in hedgerows, accesses or vacant areas of the site.

3) Health and Safety

- (a) Personal responsibilities

Plot holders have a duty of care (responsibility) to anyone on their individual plot and on the overall allotment site regardless of whether or not they have personal permission to be there. Plot holders should act responsibly and comply with any health and safety law or information provided by SAS.
- (b) Hazard reporting

Plot holders should report concerns about health and safety on their plot, or the site, to SAS. Plot holder's visitors to the allotments site should be made aware of any ongoing health and safety issues by the plot holder.
- (c) Personal safety

Plot holders often spend long periods of time alone on their allotment plots and should preferably let someone know where they are and what time they will return home.
- (d) Vandalism

Good perimeter fencing around the Allotment Site has been provided by SPC. It is the responsibility of plot holders to maintain their tools, etc. in a safe and secure condition. Plot holders should always report instances of vandalism to the police and obtain an incident number. Also the incident should be reported to SAS.

- (e) Chemical use
Plot holders have a duty of care with regards to the proper storage and use of herbicides and pesticides. This includes weed killers, rat poisons, fungicides, and soil sterilants. Contacts for advice on cutting down on chemicals usage are given in Appendix 1 – Resources.
- (f) Tetanus
Tetanus is an illness caused by bacteria present in the soil and manure and which can enter the bloodstream through a cut, scratch, or abrasion. Plot holders are advised to have a vaccination that may protect them against this disease. Plot holders should wear gloves whenever handling soil, compost or manure.
- (g) Vermin
Many mammals including rats can void the causative bacterium of Weil's disease in their urine. Plot holders must report any evidence of rats on the Allotment Site to SAS who will discuss and agree the most appropriate control for the plot holder to take.
- (h) Allotment soil content
It is recommended that all produce grown in direct contact with the soil is thoroughly washed to remove all traces of soil and possible associated contaminants before cooking or eating.
- (i) Asbestos and glass sheeting
Formerly commonly available products such as asbestos sheeting, gutters and pipes, roofing components, or glass panes, etc. may be found from historic deposits. If found it is the responsibility of the plot holder to dispose of these products away from the Allotment Site.

4) Hens and Rabbits

Under normal allotment assignments, provided the plot is used mainly for growing vegetables and fruit, plot holders are allowed to keep hens (but not cockerels) and/or rabbits on their allotment plots. Any plot holder wishing to keep hens and/or rabbits must discuss and obtain SAS's agreement to the arrangements prior to these being put in place and accept the installation and other costs involved. The plot holder should expect SAS to carry out spot checks, with or without notice, on such hens and/or rabbits and their welfare conditions.

- (a) At the very minimum the plot holder will be expected to adhere to the following responsibilities and conditions, and carry the associated costs:
 - Provision of suitable fences and structures to make sure the hens and/or rabbits cannot escape;
 - Provision of the correct living environment for the hens and/or rabbits;
 - Provision of full contact details with 24-hour contact numbers in case of emergencies.
- (b) The plot holder must not let hens and/or rabbits become a health risk or a nuisance.

5) Organic Areas

Certain areas of the Allotment Site have been designated Organic Areas. These areas have been designated following a survey of past and intended future horticultural practices utilised on the plots contained within these areas. The intention is to preserve as far as is feasible the 'organic nature' of the plots within these areas. Plot holders will be advised if they are in an Organic Area. The following gives guidance as to what is regarded as appropriate and good practice on plots within the Organic Areas and further references are given in Appendix 1.

An organic gardener strives to work in harmony with natural systems and to minimize and continually replenish any resources the garden consumes. Organic gardening, then, begins with attention to the soil. You regularly add organic matter to the soil, using locally available resources wherever possible. And everyone has access to the raw ingredients of organic matter, because your lawn, garden and kitchen produce them everyday. Decaying plant wastes, such as grass clippings, fallen leaves and vegetable scraps from your kitchen, are the building blocks of compost, the ideal organic matter for your garden soil.

Many gardeners wonder what exactly organic gardening means. The simple answer is that organic gardeners don't use synthetic fertilizers or pesticides on their plants. But gardening organically is much more than what you don't do. When you garden organically, you think of your plants as part of a whole system within Nature that starts in the soil and includes the water supply, people, wildlife and even insects.

What is organic gardening? The term 'organic gardening' is commonly used to describe cultivation systems which make minimal use of manufactured chemical substances. A fundamental feature is reliance on manures and fertilizers derived only from animal or plant remains. These are practical elements of a broader philosophy which takes a holistic view of gardening, emphasizing the interdependence of life forms. Conserving natural resources and avoiding pollution and health hazards are further important elements in the concept of organic gardening.

So how do I manage my plot organically? The simplest guide there is, is simply "if it isn't manure or compost then exercise caution" it is also worth noting that just because a product may be considered organic does not mean that it might not be harmful in some way. It certainly doesn't mean "chemical free" as pretty much everything apart from energy is comprised of chemicals, but it generally means free of 'synthetic' chemicals (i.e. substances that are man-made and aren't sourced from natural processes).

These generally come in three groups associated with gardening:

- 1) Fertilisers – to stimulate growth
- 2) Herbicides – used to kill weeds
- 3) Pesticides – to kill insects and other pests

Appendix 1 - Resources

- a) Health and Safety on Allotments – a management guide; The GreenHouse, Hereford Street, Bristol, BS3 4NA (ari@farmgarden.org.uk);
- b) Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) – factsheets on a wide range of allotments topics (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari);
- c) National Allotment Gardens Trust – a registered charity to assist in all areas of promotion and allotment regeneration (www.nagtrust.org);
- d) National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) (www.nsalg.org.uk);
- e) Organic gardening advice may be found at:
Garden Organic (www.gardenorganic.org.uk);
www.rhs.org.uk/Advice/PDFs/GYO/Organic-gardening ;
www.edenallotments.co.uk/allotment-guide.pdf .
- f) Growing Schools Programme – resource for teachers linking the curriculum to the “outdoor classroom” (www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools) & (growing.schools@dfes.qsi.gov.uk);
- g) Royal Horticultural Society (www.rhs.org.uk)
- h) Useful publications:-
Kitchen Garden magazine;
The Allotment Handbook – Caroline Foley, New Holland Publishers (UK), ISBN 1-84330-583-6;
Allotment Gardening – an organic guide for beginners – Susan Berger, Green Books, ISBN 1-903998-54-9.
- i) General background on allotments in the UK (<http://www.allotment.org.uk>)
- j) A free Factsheet on “The welfare of animals on allotments” is available from the RSPCA.

Appendix 2 – Glossary

allotment plot – a piece of land which is allocated to an allotment plot holder and which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the plot holder for the production of vegetables or fruit by him/herself and family.

Allotment Site - the land referred to in the lease agreement between Streatley Parish Council (SPC) and Thames Water provided for use by subdivision into common areas and allotment plots.

allotment provider - the organisation (*SAS* on behalf of *SPC*) that rents out the allotment plot to the plot holder (tenant).

allotment authority - a local council (*SPC*) with a statutory provision to provide allotments.

common areas – the areas between and providing access to plots including access roads, turning areas and pathways.

devolved management - arrangement (Memorandum of Understanding (*MoU*)) by which the allotment provider (in the form of *SAS*) manages the Allotment Site in agreement with the local council (*SPC*).

Lease - legal document signed by *SPC* with the Allotment Site owner (*Thames Water*).

plot holder (tenant) - the person renting an allotment from the allotment provider.

Organic Areas – parts of the Allotment Site which have been identified as having been worked in a manner consistent with good ‘organic practice’ and where the continuance of such practices is expected.

Organic gardening - gardening method without the use of chemical fertilisers or pesticides, and focusing on increasing the natural health of soil. Several natural chemical products are acceptable to organic gardening organisations

Tenancy Agreement - legal document the plot holder signs when renting an allotment plot.