



# ALLOTMENT HOLDERS HANDBOOK

Basildon Council  
BASILDON • BILLERICAY • WICKFORD



**CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU FOR TAKING  
UP A COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AND JOINING THE EVER  
INCREASING COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE GROWING  
THEIR OWN FRUIT AND VEGETABLES.**

Interest in gardening and allotment growing has risen greatly in recent years and this is reflected by the long allotment waiting lists both locally and nationally. This booklet contains some tips on growing vegetables to help get you started and a calendar of jobs to plan your allotment year.

# GETTING STARTED

## **ALLOTMENTS ENABLE YOU TO GROW YOUR OWN FOOD AND IMPROVE YOUR FAMILY'S DIET. IT IS ALSO A GREAT WAY OF GETTING EXERCISE, LEARNING NEW SKILLS AND MAKING NEW FRIENDS.**

By signing the tenancy agreement you are making a commitment to maintain the plot throughout the year, keeping it weed free and in a good state of cultivation and fertility. Please see your tenancy agreement for a full list of conditions.

To make best use of your allotment it is suggested that you draw a sketch of how you intend to lay the plot out, including permanent features such as sheds, water butts and manure heaps.

We require you to leave a strip nine inches (23cms) wide along the edge of the allotment to form a division of eighteen inches (46cms) of pathway between plots. You are responsible for keeping this pathway properly cut and must not cultivate within

nine inches (23cms) from paved pathways and roads adjoining the allotment.

The remaining areas will be for crop production. Fruit bushes, rhubarb and asparagus will be in the ground for many years and can be grown in a separate area from your vegetables.

The vegetable patch can be divided into smaller areas to enable you to practice crop rotation. Growing the same crops in the same part of the plot year after year will result in reduced yields as soil nutrients are used up. Soil borne pests and diseases can also take hold, affecting crop health and returns. Rotating crops yearly helps prevent this and makes best use of soil nutrients. Certain vegetables have similar nutrient requirements and can be grown together. A three year rotation is often used as in the example below.

### **YEAR 1**

Root vegetables: carrots, parsnips, beetroot, leeks and also potatoes.

### **YEAR 2**

Legumes (peas and beans) plus tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers.

### **YEAR 3**

Brassicas (the cabbage family): cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, kale, turnips and swede.

	Bed 1	Bed 2	Bed 3
Year 1	Roots	Legumes	Brassicas
Year 2	Brassicas	Roots	Legume
Year 3	Legumes	Brassicas	Roots

In the fourth year the roots return to Bed 1 and so on.

In Year 1 the roots/potato area does not need to receive any manure or lime, but some fertiliser. The legumes group has a heavy manure dressing and a little fertiliser or lime. The brassicas need average amounts of manure and fertiliser but may need a heavy lime application depending on soil type. Over the three year period the whole plot receives a balance of manure and fertiliser. The actual crops you choose to grow will of course depend on your personal taste.

# SOIL TYPE AND PREPARATION

**THE SOIL IN OUR  
BOROUGH IS  
HEAVY LONDON  
CLAY. CLAY SOILS  
CAN BE WET  
IN WINTER AND  
DRY QUICKLY IN  
HOT SUMMERS.**

**TO OVERCOME  
THESE EXTREMES  
DIG WELL ROTTED  
FARMYARD  
MANURE, LEAF  
MOULD OR  
COMPOST INTO  
THE SOIL.**

This will help to break up the clay, improve drainage and air circulation and add essential nutrients. It is likely that your plot will have had some bulky manure added over the years and it is just a question of keeping the soil in good condition.

We recommend that clay soils are dug over in the autumn before they become too wet. However you may be taking on the allotment at another time of the year so ground preparation can be started at any time, weather permitting. The aim is to improve the soil structure, so keep off the site if it is very wet.

Whether your plot is overgrown or weed-free, dig it rather than rotavate. If there are perennial weeds or grass on the plot you will need to remove these with a spade.

Rotavating will spread the roots over the plot and may make the weed situation worse. Rotavating will not go as deep as digging meaning that air and water will not penetrate so deep. Aim to dig to the full depth of the spade, breaking up the soil and removing weeds as you go. This

can take a while especially on a big plot, but the effort will be worth it.

Dig a small area at a time rather than trying to cultivate the whole plot in one session which could strain leg and back muscles. Gradually work through the plot removing any weeds that do grow back. Break the soil down further by raking and you will soon have an area fine enough to sow seeds or plant out.

The weeds that you remove from the plot can go on your compost heap (except for roots of perennial weeds like dandelions, bindweed and thistles), can be put in your green compost bin at home or taken to the Pitsea or Barleylands green recycling sites for composting. Please note that we do not allow bonfires on our allotment sites.

If the soil is too wet to cultivate you may be able to put up your shed. Before starting you must get the Council's approval for the building.



A shed application form is included with this booklet. It tells you the maximum size allowed and permitted building materials. Please complete the form and send it to the address shown for approval.

If you wish to put up a greenhouse or poly tunnel please discuss this with the Allotments Officer before you start work. Buildings, water butts, compost bins and manure heaps must be sited within your plot and not obstruct paths, gates or neighbouring allotments. Even if you do not intend to have a shed consider saving rain water in tanks or butts on your plot.

Once your plot is dug and weed-free you can start to grow in accordance with your sketch and crop rotation plan.



# PLANTING

**IN THE FIRST YEAR YOU MAY WISH TO TRY A LIMITED RANGE OF EASIER TO GROW CROPS SO THAT YOU GET TO KNOW THE SOIL AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE.**

Potatoes are often grown in the first year to help break up the soil and lettuce and radish are fast growing to give an early return.

Remember to speak to neighbouring plot holders about which crops and varieties do well in the local conditions and any that have failed in the past. People are always willing to offer advice and share their experience.





## THE ALLOTMENT YEAR

There are many good books, magazines and web sites devoted to vegetable growing offering advice on raising crops and just as importantly storing and cooking them. Seed packets include instructions on when to sow, prick out, plant and harvest your chosen crops.

The following is a brief guide to the jobs that you may need to be doing throughout the year. Sowing, planting and harvesting times are for an average year. Cold, wet springs may delay sowing and planting and excessively wet or dry seasons can affect the harvest time and yield.

# YEAR PLANNER



## JANUARY

Harvest Brussels sprouts, celery, Jerusalem artichokes, kale, leeks and winter cabbage.

Order vegetable seeds and seed potatoes.

Keep overwintering crops clean by removing dead leaves, clear weeds and spent crops.

## FEBRUARY

Harvest Brussels sprouts, kale, cabbage, broccoli, leeks.

Sow broad beans, summer cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers and lettuce under glass.

Plant Jerusalem artichokes, onion sets and shallots.

Cut down autumn fruiting raspberries and tie new canes to wires as they grow.

## MARCH

Harvest broccoli, kale, leeks and Brussels sprouts.

Sow broad beans, cabbages, celery, lettuces, leeks, onions and Brussels sprouts.

Plant asparagus, globe artichokes, onions, shallots and garlic.

Hoe to remove weeds

## APRIL

Harvest broccoli, spring cabbages, kale and leeks.

Sow beetroot, cabbages, carrots, cauliflowers and turnips.

Plant globe artichokes, cauliflowers, onions, early and main crop potatoes.

Hoe to remove weeds.

## MAY

Harvest asparagus, broad beans, spring cabbages, radishes, lettuce and salad leaves.

Sow French and runner beans, kale, savoy cabbages, sweet corn, beetroots, carrots, lettuces and radishes.

Plant Brussels sprouts and late potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli and cucumbers.

Earth up early potatoes.

Hoe to remove weeds.

Keep watch for insect pests such as black fly, carrot and onion fly.

Place straw under strawberries to keep soil off the fruit.



## JUNE

Harvest broad beans, peas, cabbages, cauliflowers, lettuce and spinach.

Sow French beans, kale, radishes, runner beans, turnips and swedes.

Plant Brussels sprouts, early cabbages, cauliflowers, celery, marrows and tomatoes.

## JULY

Harvest broad beans, cauliflowers, French beans, globe artichokes, runner beans, marrows, peas, potatoes, soft fruit and rhubarb.

Sow spring cabbages, radishes, beetroots, carrots and lettuces.

Plant Brussels sprouts, kale and leeks.

Hoe weeds, water crops, tie in tomatoes and remove side shoots.

Keep watch for aphids, slugs and cabbage caterpillars.

## AUGUST

Harvest globe artichokes, beetroot, cucumbers, beans, peas, cauliflowers, onions, sweet corn and tomatoes.

Sow cabbages, spinach, winter lettuce and onions.

Hoe weeds, water crops as necessary, dry onions prior to lifting.

## SEPTEMBER

Harvest beetroots, beans, artichokes, marrows, courgettes, onions, peas, potatoes, parsnips and sweet corn.

Sow winter lettuces, turnips, cauliflowers and perpetual spinach.

Plant spring cabbages and Japanese onion sets.

Continue weed removal, water crops, keep watch for cabbage caterpillars.

## OCTOBER

Harvest beetroots, Brussels sprouts, carrots, cucumbers, onions, parsnips, peas, potatoes.

Plant cabbages and winter lettuce.

Dig over the allotment; apply manure to the potato plot.

## NOVEMBER

Harvest remaining beetroot, Brussels sprouts, carrots, celery, leeks, winter cabbages and cauliflowers.

Sow broad beans and peas.

Plant garlic and new rhubarb crowns.

Complete winter digging. Dig manure into the legumes bed.

## DECEMBER

Harvest Brussels sprouts, cauliflowers, celery, kale, leeks and winter cabbages.

Plant onion sets.

Paint wooden sheds during dry spells.

# USEFUL TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PLOT

- Plan ahead so that your plot is ready for sowing/planting
- Follow local weather forecast and time your cultivation, planting, watering and harvesting accordingly
- Ask a neighbouring plot holder to look after your plot if you're away. You can return the favour if they are away
- Collectively buy and share seeds with other plot holders to reduce costs
- Use water sparingly. Watering with a hose pipe is wasteful, use a can instead. Water in the early morning or evening around the base of the plant for best results
- If you have restricted mobility or difficulty bending construct some raised beds. These are also useful for growing herbs as they provide better drainage
- Keep a diary of your allotment year noting seeding, planting and harvesting times. Note your successes and try to repeat or better them next year
- Above all enjoy your plot and the pleasure that growing your produce brings





The council renews its allotment tenancies in April each year. We will contact you by post to advise of the rental for the coming year. There is a form to return to us confirming whether or not you wish to continue renting the plot. Therefore please inform us if you change your address or other contact details.

By law the council can only rent its allotments to residents of the borough. If you move out of the area you must give up your Basildon Council allotment. You may be able to rent a plot from your new local authority.

We understand that circumstances may change, perhaps because of injury or illness or a change to work or family commitments. Please advise us as soon as possible if you no longer require the plot or have difficulty in maintaining it. This will allow us to offer the plot to someone on the waiting list. If you give up the allotment you may qualify for a partial refund of the rent. If the council takes the plot away from you because you do not pay the rent or fail to maintain it properly you may have to pay to have it

brought back to a good condition. Please see the General Conditions section on page 3 of your tenancy agreement.

## **ALLOTMENT CONTACTS**

The National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners:

**01536 266576**  
**[www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk)**

One of the plot holders at our Wickford site has set up an internet forum for people to make contact with other growers, exchange information and give and receive advice on allotment issues. The forum address is **<http://wickford-allotment.lefora.com>**.

**For more info please contact:**

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