

Growing in our Community

Ryhill Allotments

Best Practice Guidance 2025



Ryhill Parish Council

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The government recognises that allotments are valuable green spaces and community assets boosting health and wellbeing, providing sustainable growing spaces and creating biodiverse green corridors. Allotments provide people with the opportunity to grow their own produce as part of the long-term promotion of environmental sustainability, health and wellbeing, community cohesion and social inclusion.

Local authorities should consider how they can broaden the appeal of allotments beyond the traditional groups to attract more women and young people with families.

It is particularly important that a range of plot sizes are made available so people who lack the time, ability, desire or need to cultivate the traditional 'ten pole' plot can still be accommodated.

Division of full plots into half plots means twice the number of applicants can be accommodated from the waiting list and can free up space not being properly cultivated.

The policy of offering only half plots to new tenants has been widely and successfully adopted by many Local authorities, Ryhill included.

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Access to water

Water is essential for plants to grow. It is particularly important that seedlings get enough water until they are established and roots can find their own moisture deeper in the ground. All tenants will need to collect and store water on their plot as direct watering from hosepipes is not an environmentally acceptable method. If you are recycling an old container to collect water ensure you know where it came from and that it did not previously contain any harmful substance.

Efficient water use

Attach guttering to garden sheds and greenhouses to collect rainwater but remember to keep water butts covered and ensure they are located on stable ground.

Organic matter can be dug into the ground and a thick layer of mulch placed around established plants to help retain moisture in the soil.

Water your allotment the morning or evening to reduce risk of evaporation or scorching. Give plants a good soaking to encourage deep rooting. Also remember over-watering can be just as unproductive as under-watering.

- Only connect hosepipes to water taps to top up your water containers
- Use mains water sparingly and only when needed
- If you have a shed or greenhouse, use a rainwater collection system
- Water containers should be covered and located on stable ground
- DO NOT use hosepipes to water you plants directly
- Sprinklers and other water spaying devices are not allowed on our allotment sites.

Composting

Why compost?

- Compost will help you save money. Improve your soil, help you grow healthy strong plants and look after the environment
- Try to compost as much green waste as you can
- Creating your own leaf mulch will improve soil texture.

Making compost is not hard. We recommend you purchase a compost bin specially designed for the purpose. Make sure it is sited on strong wire mesh to stop rats gaining access but ensure holes are small enough for beneficial worms and bugs.

Digging or 'turning your compost occasionally will help speed up the process.

RATS! Rats do not like disturbance so put your compost bin somewhere you pass often.

If you give it a good rat a tat tat with a stick every time you pass it will discourage them from taking up residence!

DO NOT add potato peeling to your compost they are a particular favourite for rats.

Rats like it warm and dry so keep your compost damp in autumn and winter.

Council asks tenants NOT to bring onto allotment sites any food waste, grass clippings or domestic produced compost in order to help keep the rat problem to a minimum.

6 Tips

- 1. Location out in the open and by a path**
- 2. Site on wire mesh**
- 3. Turn compost regularly**
- 4. Keep it damp - rats like warm and dry**
- 5. Keep clutter away from bin - no hiding places!**

Leaf Mulch

Leaf mulch (leaf mould) is completely free and can help to improve your soil texture, suppress weeds, and reduce the need for watering.

Gather up autumn leaves and place them in a heap. By using four pots and some chicken wire you can create an area that will contain the leaves but still allow air to circulate around them. It takes about two years for leaves to break down fully but digging over occasionally with a fork will speed up the process.

To use the mulch spread a thick layer around your plants to suppress weeds (allowing worms to eventually pull it down into the soil) or dig it directly into the soil (with your compost) to improve your soil.

- You should focus on improving and maintaining soil fertility
- Organic methods can benefit your plot, the environment and wildlife.

BIODIVERSITY



Building biodiversity into our allotments

We encourage you to consider more organic approaches for the benefit of local wildlife and the wider environment.

Allotment sites can make a communal effort to be wildlife friendly by managing hedges appropriately and setting aside unmown grassy areas to nurture insects and amphibians.

A patch of nettles will provide both food and a breeding area for butterflies.

Many good allotment sites have special areas which are left virtually untouched to allow wildlife to thrive. A thick hedge is invaluable as it can provide food for insects, birds and mammals.

A hedge can be a green corridor which allows wildlife to move from place to place in relative safety.

The 25% Bio diversity “Rule”

Some allotment associations in the UK (such as NADCAA) suggest that up to 25% of an allotment plot can be allocated to increasing biodiversity and wildlife habitats. This figure is distinct from the mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) required under the Environment Act 2021 which applies to new land developments in England and is a planning condition, not a rule for existing individual allotment management.

Some things you can do:

- Plant nectar rich flowers to attract pollinators and encourage beneficial insects
- Companion planting can repel pests
- Feed birds in winter and put up bird boxes
- Create habitats for wildlife, bee boxes, bug hotels, hedgehog homes
- Log piles are an easy way to create refuge for frogs, toads, centipedes, slow worms and ground beetles, all of which help to control pests and insects
- Minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers.

Remember only work your soil if it is the right condition. If it sticks to your boots it is too wet and you will do more harm than good!

Weeds

- Keep your plot free from weeds
- Don't let weeds set seeds
- Annual weeds & vegetation can be composted
- Be sure to remove all roots of perennial weeds.

Pesticides and herbicides

Pesticides, herbicides and in organic fertiliser can be helpful when clearing and cultivating an allotment however they can also be hazardous and have environmental implications.

We recommend trying to minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilisers or reduce the level of use over time.

Weed killers (herbicides)

These fall into 2 types: Contact and Systemic.

Contact weed killers can be used for large areas of annual weeds and usually work on contact with foliage. They have minimal impact on

perennial weeds such as nettles or brambles – save your money and use a hoe instead.

Systemic weed killers such as glyphosate destroy plants from within, including their roots usually following spray application to the foliage. They are therefore useful for controlling perennial weeds such as bindweed, couch grass, ground elder and bramble.

We advise restricting their use to the initial clearance of plots, after that any regrowth can be tackled by hand weeding.

It is important that you check any old products you may have stored in your shed. Many commonly used products have now been withdrawn from sale due to adverse impact on the environment and their use is now banned.

!!! When using pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers always follow the advice given on the container.

Bonfires

- Only have a bonfire when it is absolutely necessary
- Composting is a much better alternative for disposing of organic waste
- Be considerate of your neighbours
- Consider weather condition & wind direction so that smoke does not cause a nuisance to residents of nearby properties
- Do not burn green or damp materials- they will produce excessive smoke
- Never leave a fire unattended
- Do not bring any materials on site to burn
- Do not burn anything that could produce toxic fumes
- Bonfires should be built on the same day as they are lit to prevent harm to small mammals which use unlit bonfires as habitat.

Bonfires must be fully extinguished before the plot holder leaves the site.

Health and Safety

An allotment should be a place to relax and enjoy the pleasures of gardening. However, it can be a place of unexpected dangers.

Some hazards that may be found on the allotment:

- Water dangers – can present a drowning risk, some bacteria can thrive in water and cause illness.
- Hazards hidden in undergrowth such as discarded tools
- Hazards may include sharp edges, exposed nails, improperly stored tools, exposed canes should be covered.
- Chemicals – products such as fertilizers, wood preservatives, pesticides and weed killers are toxic substances. These need to be used correctly and can be dangerous to humans, pets and plants.
- Pests – as well as damaging crops rats and mice can carry diseases which can be harmful to humans.

This list is not exhaustive there are many other hazards on an allotment site.

Risk Assessments

The aim of the risk assessment process is to ensure that no one is injured or becomes ill as a result of activities carried out on the allotment.

Risk assessment will identify measures needed to comply with legislation, help prioritise in the decision making process and improve cost effectiveness of resource allocation.

The process of risk assessment involves studying the activities and deciding what could cause harm. Consideration must be given to the likelihood that harm could occur in practice. The initial part of the process is to identify the precautions that need to be taken in order to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring. When carrying out this process consideration must be given to legal requirements and guidance on good practice.

Anything that could cause harm is generally referred to as a HAZARD. The probability that someone will be harmed by a hazard is called the RISK.

The Risk assessment process you use only needs to be a simple procedure.

Identifying risks by:

- considering the dangers posed by the hazard;
- deciding who could be harmed and how;
- identifying what action you need to take i.e. further control measures;
- recording the results of the assessment; and
- revising the assessment when necessary

Homemade weed killer

1 gallon vinegar

1cup salt

1tsp washing-up liquid

OR

For a spray bottle

¼ cup salt

1 squirt washing up liquid

Fill rest with vinegar.

Useful websites and publications

www.thenas.gov.uk /winter –wildlife –allotments -biodiversity

www.enablelc.org –wildlife on allotments (Natural England)

The National Allotment Society From soil to soil - How allotments Boost Well- being and Community