



Allotment Management - Good Practice Guidelines

Eastney allotments comprise a soil structure that is predominately light and stony, overlaying a deeper clay base. Consequently, flooding in winter and very dry conditions in summer present typical problems for allotment holders. In dealing with this scenario, we offer the following advice and guidance.

Compost

Peat harvesting for compost has long been recognised as damaging for the environment and climate. The Government intends to ban the use of peat compost in 2024. We will therefore be obliged to use peat-free compost soon.

Peat-free compost has been received with mixed reviews in recent years. Typical complaints focus on low nutrient content, poor water retention and high prices. However, it appears that the quality of peat-free compost is improving. **Which Gardening** carry out extensive trials on peat-free compost and update their findings every January.

According to Which Gardening in March 2022, Fertile Fibre scored 85% for seed compost (need to score 75% for recommendation purposes) B&Q Enriched Multi-Purpose Compost scored 86% for young plant compost and is described 'as good as peat' while Miracle Grow Premium Moisture Control scored 78% for pots and baskets. (www.which.co.uk/gardening)

Given careful management of water absorption and nutrient content, peat-free compost should give high levels of germination, good growth and acceptable harvests.

Growing Methods

- Raised Beds are justly popular and are an ideal way to manage an allotment and produce good quality crops. The simplest raised bed involves no cost as the principle is to create a growing area that is not walked on but easily managed in order to keep weeds at bay and produce a good crop. They work well with poorly drained soils and can extend the growing season (rhs.org.uk).
Should you be interested in having raised beds constructed from pallet wood at very reasonable cost, **Action Asylum** organise working parties of asylum seekers (their asylum applications pending) to carry out practical work in the community. Enquire through the Allotment Association or actionasylum@portsmouthsanctuary.org
- No Dig gardening has gained in popularity since the 1980s particularly through the pioneering work of **Charles Dowding**. No Dig involves the hoeing of annual weeds, hand-weeding of perennial weeds and the inclusion of compost on the surface each year. The benefits include, no digging, rich soil structure, stronger water retention, easier crop management and healthier plants (charlesdowding.co.uk).

- Companion Planting is widely regarded as advantageous in many ways, increasing crop yield, improving biodiversity, creating good ground cover and reducing watering needs. Popular companions include marigolds and tomatoes and the Three Sisters – sweet corn, beans and squash See **Companion Chart @ gilmour.com**.
- Multisowing Culture – setting seed or young plants in groups or bunches is a form of companion planting. Giving good yields, maximising space and saving compost and time, group planting works well with summer onions, leeks, beetroot, radish and turnip (**charlesdowding.co.uk**).
- Perennial Vegetables are becoming more popular in areas of low water availability. They are usually grown in raised beds using no-dig methods. Typically, perennial crops include rhubarb, perpetual spinach, sorrel and watercress but cauliflower, broccoli, kale and Egyptian (Walking) onions can also be grown as perennials.

Localised Flooding

- Use a spade to create a V-shape wedge between growing bed and path.
- Dig a small ditch between growing bed and path.
- Create a drainage ditch/sump where water accumulates.
- Build up allotment bed over time; use raised beds; grow plants according to local conditions.
- Consider growing winter tares (green manure) - will need to be dug-in during spring.
- Contact the Allotment Association and/or PCC in serious cases of persistent flooding.

Pests and Diseases

Slugs, blackfly, carrot fly and potato blight can wreak havoc on the allotment. How we deal with these problems is changing considering serious concerns about sustainability and biodiversity in the natural world. The use of chemical controls is gradually giving way to organic control despite the continued use of the pollinator harming pesticide neonicotinoid in farming.

Our advice is to treat pests and diseases organically along the lines of this 7-point plan from **Garden Organic**:

- Maintain a healthy soil using compost and manures that add plenty of nutrients.
- Use crop rotation to prevent harmful diseases building-up in the soil.
- Create a diversity of plant life; mix flowers and vegetables to attract beneficial wildlife.
- Never be tempted to use toxic chemicals and sprays; they kill the pest and create health hazards for birds and other beneficial insects.
- Choose plants that do well on the plot. Plants that struggle to grow are vulnerable to pests and disease.
- Be vigilant; check barriers, traps and covers especially after rain. Maintain a clean plot; debris lying around will provide a home for slugs and snails.
- Use bio controls for specific pests such as nematodes (purchase online only).



Potato and tomato blight is becoming commonplace. Caused by humid conditions, blight arrives from early summer and can readily destroy an entire crop of potatoes or tomatoes. There are currently no fungicides available for use against blight; Bordeaux Mixture (Copper Sulphate) having been banned for several years. So, what can be done?

- Be vigilant. If caught early, cut off potato haulms at ground level to prevent spores infecting the crop itself.
- Likewise, tomatoes; pick unaffected fruits though it is highly likely healthy-looking fruits will have been infected.
- Dispose of infected stems and plants either deep in the ground or via green waste recycling services; do not compost.
- Buy blight resistant tomato plants/seeds, for example, Crimson Crush/Blush/Plum
- Buy potato varieties that offer some blight resistance.
- Grow potatoes indoors, earlier, or later in the season, in a windy location or maybe, not at all.
- Access **BlightSpy** to keep track of data relating to Blight in the UK (linked to the **Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board - AHDB**).

Plastics

A symbol of our throwaway culture, plastics continue to pollute our environment on a global scale, killing wildlife and endangering our own health.

There are 7 types of commercially produced plastic – gardenorganic.org.uk provides a concise summary – essential reading.

We endorse garden organic's principle of **Reduce, Reuse and Recycle**

- Do not use Type 1 or 'single use' plastic drinks bottles as cloches. The plastic readily breaks down and in doing so leaches chemicals into the soil.
- Type 5 Polypropylene is commonly used in pots, trays, ropes, and netting. It has good resistance to wear and tear but should be recycled when broken, cracked, or no longer required.
- Begin to use alternatives to plastic, for example, fibre or bioplastic pots.
- For over-winter mulching use cardboard instead of plastic sheeting or carpet.
- Type 6 Polystyrene is classified as potentially carcinogenic. Do not use.
- Ensure your plot and adjacent areas are free from plastics. Bag up and dispose of all plastic waste even if blown in from other places.



Water

- Water is supplied on the allotment site at various collection points between March and October each year.
- Growing plants respond best to rainwater rather than tap water. Collect rainwater from sheds and greenhouses throughout the year.
- If there are no structures on your allotment install a suitable barrel, fill from the mains, cover and leave for several days before using.
- Vegetables have specific watering needs. Employing a watering can is much more effective than using a hose and reduces the need to water. Watering should ideally be carried out in the early morning or late evening. Water younger plants more heavily and reduce amounts as they mature until they set flowers/fruit when more water is required.
- Using a hose in times of drought especially when water pressure is low is inefficient, time-consuming and a cause of friction between ploholders. When demand for water is high, ploholders must act reasonably; half an hour on the tap is considered a fair amount of time for any individual during such times.

General Principles

Keep your plot tidy to deter rodents, slugs and snails and the build-up of harmful pests and diseases.

Regularly inspect and turn your compost bin to promote the composting process and to deter nesting of rodents.

Maintain adjacent grass paths as stipulated in our agreement with **Portsmouth City Council**.

Attract beneficial wildlife to your plot.

Work in cooperation with your neighbours to resolve any mutual difficulties in your area; bring problems to the attention of the Allotment Association.

Enjoy your allotment and all the benefits it brings to our collective well-being.

Members of our Allotment Association are automatically affiliated to the National Allotment Society – nsalg.org.uk

This site has a wealth of useful advice and tips for allotment holders. There are downloads available to cover all aspects of allotment gardening.

These Good Practice Guidelines will be updated annually.

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