

Basic Requirements For A New Plotholder

Taking on an allotment is a commitment and takes time to manage; many new plotholders greatly underestimate the input required to ensure a successful and productive plot.



Time: It is essential that you look *realistically* at your other life commitments and consider whether working a plot can be seriously worked into the other activities you need to schedule in. Depending on the size of the plot and season you will need to put in an average of at least 2 hours a week; this is likely to be more during the active growing season when weeds thrive, more watering may need to be done and active sowing/planting is expected to take place.

Fitness levels: You must also be sure that you are physically able, or can get any necessary help from friends/family, to initially clear and subsequently manage the plot.

As long as you have the enthusiasm, are fit enough, and have enough commitment, your allotment should be a rewarding and fulfilling activity!



Clearing & Preparing a New Plot

This may well be the hardest work you will ever do on the allotment. Prepare the plot well from the beginning, and you will save time and effort in the future.

Whilst it may be tempting to start with building sheds etc this has to be balanced with making sure the plot does not become even more overgrown in the meantime.



Check over your plot and remove any unwanted materials that may have been left by previous tenants. If the plot is overgrown with grass it is easiest to remove the surface growth using a strimmer; if it is overgrown with brambles then a more robust tool such as petrol driven hedge cutters can be used. These can be hired from equipment stores such as HSS - <http://www.hss.com/stores/113/lewisham-london/lewisham>

Please be careful when using these tools and wear protective goggles/gloves and also ensure you work a couple of inches above the soil surface to prevent damage to the tools.



We encourage organic methods of gardening but if weeds/brambles are persistent and difficult to handle then plotholders may wish to consider using a systemic herbicide (Glyphosate) to knock back the remaining growth.



As there may potentially be a large amount of green waste produced from clearance then now is a good time to create a compost bin area at the back of your plot. Compost bins can be purchased from local garden centres or for larger amounts of waste you might like to consider creating your own compost bin –

http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/htbg/module7/making_your_own_compost1.shtml



Once the surface of the plot has been cleared the soil needs to be further prepared for planting. You will be aiming for a fine tilth ensuring all weeds and weed roots have been removed. To do this you will need to dig over the plot with a fork/spade (depending on how heavy the soil is; a spade may be easier if the soil is heavy clay and has not been turned over for some time). The process of digging over enables heavy clods to be broken up, allows air

and moisture in and produces a finer textured soil which will give new planting the best possible start. Digging is physically demanding work; it is therefore recommended that you do a little often.



Some plottolders may consider hiring a rotovator but please note that whilst this will break up and turn over the soil, it will also chop up perennial weed roots, some of which can easily regenerate if not removed; soil structure can also be damaged when used on clay soils.

Once the plot is cleared, weeds will come back! You will need to remove weeds regularly as they compete for light and nutrients and will suppress crops if not kept in check.

Remember to inform the Allotments Officer or your site secretary if you are unable to work the plot for any reason - or you could risk losing your plot!



Raised beds – the making of a number of raised beds with pathways in between can make the plot easier to manage and less onerous than attempting to clear the whole plot. It also prevents treading on and compacting the soil. The width of each bed should be approximately 4 foot; this makes it easier to work the bed from each side without straining or having to step onto the bed.

Adding organic matter, such as farmyard manure, in Autumn/Early Winter will help add nutrients and improve soil texture. Please ensure manure is well rotted down before adding as fresh manure will damage tender seedling roots.

For more information on getting started on your plot you may find the following sites useful –



Allotment – Getting Started

Royal Horticultural Society - <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=84>



Composting Advice – (please note Lewisham Compost Bins are subject to availability and can only be supplied to residential addresses) –

<http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/wasterecycle/Garden-waste/Documents/CompostingAtHome.pdf>



General growing advice –

Royal Horticultural Society - <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own>

National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners Ltd- <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/growing-advice/>



Organic Gardening - <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>