



Guidance notes to accompany document: *Allotment rule update April 2015*

This document has been produced in response to points raised by tenants through the consultation we carried out last year as part of the review of the allotment rules.

Its aim is to provide more information for tenants on the new rules, which are due to come into effect from 1 April 2015 and can be found in the document: ***Allotment rule update – April 2015***.

Overview of the allotment rule review and reasons for it

The review of the rules was carried out in response to feedback we were receiving from many of our allotment tenants. Following consultation with you, the new rules are being introduced with the intention of providing clearer guidance on:

- how the council expects tenants to look after their plots
- what is looked for in inspections and when improvements may be required.

The council must balance the personal wishes of tenants and allow Individuals to grow crops as they see fit, while also providing some protection to surrounding tenants from the potential knock-on effects from plots that have been allowed to fall into a poor condition.

At times we need to take action when a plot is in a poor condition and this can result in notices being issued. Through the introduction of these new rules, we anticipate tenants will have a **clearer understanding of what is expected** of them, which in turn will mean **fewer notices** will need to be issued.

Allotment cultivation

The following information relates to points found on pages 1 and 2 of the document: ***Allotment rule update – April 2015***

Seasonal changes to the inspections [as per points 7 and 10]

Tenants said: they wanted to know more about what would be looked for in the inspection and how these might better reflect the seasonal nature of allotment growing.

As a result: the cultivation rules have been adapted so that during:

- **spring** – as long as **60 per cent** of the plot is being worked and prepared for crops, it will be considered cultivated
- **summer** – crops will need to be seen to be growing and weeds kept under control
- **autumn and winter** – there is greater flexibility during the dormant winter months so tenants can allow some weeds to grow to act as a green manure, however a plot must be managed and kept tidy during the winter, otherwise a notice may be issued.

Avoiding abandoned areas on your plot [as per points 3 and 4]

The allotment must be cultivated throughout, which means you cannot focus on one half of your plot for growing, leaving the other end to go wild, as this will be considered as non-cultivation and will lead to a notice.

The whole plot must be worked, ideally with crops or fruit grown throughout, however 40 per

cent of the plot can be used as a managed non-cultivated area, this might include a parking area at the front of your plot or a lawn area, wildflower meadow or small paved area to sit and relax.

Attracting wildlife [as per points 3, 6 and 10]

The inclusion of wild flowers and ponds (which are attractive for wildlife) are permitted providing they are managed in some way and as long as 60 per cent of the plot is used for cultivating crops.

As fruit trees are included as part of your cultivated land, you can grow wildflowers or flowers under fruit trees and this would be considered as cultivated land. However wildflower areas need cutting back ideally two or three times a year to stop invasive grasses establishing and must be kept free from seeding weeds and woody invasive weeds such as brambles.

Fruit trees [as per point 2]

The number of fruit trees allowed on a plot is restricted so as not to cause shading issues for surrounding plots. However the new rules allow for tenants on half plots to plant a second fruit tree. Additional trees, which must be dwarfing trees that are pruned so as not to cause shading (such as espaliered or cordon grown trees), may also be planted providing written permission has first been granted.

What is invasive weed? [as per point 4]

For the purposes of the rules, an invasive weed can be defined as any larger aggressive weed that is being seen as causing a problem. This would include brambles, thorns, woody shrubs and nettles, as well as any invasive ornamental plants that are not being controlled and allowed to spread onto paths or adjoining plots and causing a nuisance or hazard.

Couch grass or other pernicious spreading weeds are not considered 'invasive' within the rules, but it is important these are controlled as they will reduce your ability to grow crops and may cause a nuisance to your neighbours.

Mulching [as per point 8 and 9]

The rules on sheet mulch, such as black weed membrane or plastic, allow 100 per cent of the cultivated area to be covered during the winter months, to allow tenants who dig over their beds to cover the soil to protect it and reduce weed growth. The use of carpet mulch, however, will be restricted and certain types of carpet brought on as of now will be now classified as a waste material.

Perennial crops grown through sheet mulch, such as bush fruit, will be considered as cultivated land and these areas are not included as part of the total sheet mulched area.

Maximising growing area and maintaining soil fertility [as per point 7]

The practice of stripping surface soil and mounding it on the plot has been banned as this greatly reduces soil fertility and reduces the growing area. Tenants must largely keep soil levels as they are, however you may move some soil to create raised beds.

Tenants are free to use bed systems for growing produce; however 60 per cent of the total plot area must be used for producing crops. If this can't be achieved within beds, you must make up the shortfall with other crop-growing areas such as perennial fruit.

Probationary inspections for new tenants [as per point 11]

New tenants will now be given a three-month probationary inspection after initially taking on their plot. If the tenant has not made a start on their plot when they have their first inspection, their tenancy will be terminated and the plot re-let as soon as possible. However if a reasonable start has been made, the tenancy will be secure and evidence of a gradual improvement to the plot over the first year will be expected.

Waste management and potentially polluting materials

The following information relates to points found on pages 2 and 3 of the document:

Allotment rule update – April 2015

The new rules in these sections have been introduced for two important reasons.

1. To control heavy waste, typically building materials such as blocks, tiles, glass windows, timber and metal, as well as bulky carpet and furniture, from coming onto the site. When introduced, these invariably stay on the plot and become a problem for future tenants to manage and also reduce the area of a plot that can be used for growing crops. The general rule of thumb is: if you don't need the materials on your allotment, then don't bring them.
2. The largely 'invisible' problem of soil pollution through the leaching of toxic chemicals when inorganic materials either deteriorate or are burnt on allotments must be addressed.

Avoiding problems caused by inorganic materials [as per point 2 of 'Potentially polluting materials' section]

Painted timber must no longer be introduced onto the site, as these may flake and release toxic chemicals into the soil. Unpainted treated or stained timber and unpainted plastics, such as polycarbonate, will be allowed, as will corrugated iron. Bonded, glued or laminated wood products are also of concern, as these products break down and release potentially polluting glues and resins into the soil.

Disposing of painted or treated timber [as per point 10 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

Painted wood products that are already on the plot are permitted to stay but as they degrade they must be removed for safe disposal and **must not be burnt**. Also any wood products that have come to the end of their useful life and which have been treated with stain or clear preservative must be removed and not burnt as they may contain toxic preservatives such as chromated copper arsenate and creosote.

A zero tolerance to the burning of inorganic materials [as per point 2 of 'Potentially polluting materials' section]

Current rules already prohibit the burning of inorganic material. We will now take a zero tolerance approach, terminating the tenancy with immediate effect of anyone found burning these on receipt of a waste notice. Inorganic waste must be removed from the allotment and disposed of safely.

Paving [as per point 4 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

The area allowed for paving has been restricted to a maximum of 10 per cent of the plot area. This is to reduce the quantities of paving, bricks and other heavy waste onto allotments. However tenants with mobility issues may apply to increase this area.

Tyres [as per point 5 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

Tyres are classed as commercial waste and so there would be a disposal cost attached that would need to be met by a new tenant should they take on a plot with tyres. As a result, tyres are no longer allowed to be brought onto the allotment. If you have tyres on your plot already these must be in use and you must count them and let the council know in writing so that these can be taken into account during future inspections.

Casement windows and glass [as per points 1 and 2 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

The rules on casement windows have been relaxed to allow for the automatic right to build two cold frames using windows. However any recycled glass that exceeds this limit will be in breach of rules and any broken glass will need dealing with immediately as this is a risk both to tenants and visitors.

Gravel and other imported aggregates [as per point 6 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

The importing of gravel and aggregates onto allotments has been restricted as stones reduce soil fertility and reduce its ability to retain moisture. Gravel may look decorative when first put down but eventually it will be incorporated into the soil, causing problems for future tenants.

Building materials [as per point 3 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

The rules on building materials have been changed so that small quantities of materials such as sections of metal or timber or bricks may be allowed as long as these have a clear cultivation use. However building materials brought onto the allotment that are not used for growing crops will be in breach of rules.

Carpets [as per point 8 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

Carpet rules have been clarified and now ban foam-backed and any synthetic plastic woven carpets as these can release toxic materials into the soil and can become incorporated in the soil, causing future cultivation issues.

From now on only organic carpet that will naturally breakdown with time is allowed on an allotment and this must cover no more than 20 per cent of the plot, including where used for paths. All carpet must also be managed and not left to become buried by weeds.

Play equipment [as per point 7 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

Small play equipment, such as swings, are allowed on allotments, but these must be kept in reasonable condition and must be removed when no longer in use.

Garden furniture [as per point 9 of 'Waste restrictions' section]

Tenants may store garden furniture, which is reasonable condition and is for use on the plot, but any household furniture or other household materials is not permitted.

Allotment litter [as per point 4 of 'Potentially polluting materials' section]

When referring to plot litter we are concerned about excessive quantities of any light inorganic materials on the plot, including plastic pots scattered around the plot as well as any loose or shredded weed membrane or plastic sheeting. It may also refer to a build-up of litter within sheds, which should also be tidied and removed.

Plots should be kept reasonably tidy as this cuts down on litter being blown onto other tenants' plots while also improving the general appearance of the allotment.

Other waste rules explained

Several tenants made comments about the contradiction of managing waste while also encouraging re-use and recycling. The council supports recycling and will allow limited materials to be brought onto the allotment for use in cultivation, however we have to balance the positives of recycling with potential for large quantities of waste to be left for future tenants to deal with.

The new waste rules do not apply to materials that are already on the allotments but to those brought onto the site after 1 April; however if any older materials breach existing rules then these will need dealing with or you risk receiving a notice.

Glass items cause a further risk issue as they can be broken and pose a risk of injury or can be heavy waste material that is difficult to dispose of by future tenants. If you have glass bottle edging or are using bottles on your plot for construction, this will need removing.

Tenants must also ensure all materials used for building structures are in line with the allotment structures policy, which can be found on the allotment web pages. Additional information on why specific materials are problematic will be available on www.norwich.gov.uk/allotments.

Criminal activity, safeguarding and other rules

The following information relates to points found on pages 3 and 4 of the document:

Allotment rule update – April 2015

Reporting criminal activity [as per points 1 and 2 of 'Criminal activity and safeguarding' section]

Tenants are not required to report all criminal activity to the police, but this is strongly encouraged as this is the best way of keeping records of criminal activity and also focusing resources.

The council will require information from the police on criminal activity before taking action in relation to a criminal act. Tenants are legally responsible for the safety of anyone on their plot, whether invited or not, so it is important plots are kept safe at all times.

Keys [as per point 1 of 'Other revised rules' section]

A small fee is now charged to all new tenants to cover the issuing costs. The keys then are considered bought and under ownership of tenant, so do not need to be returned at the end of tenure. While this is the case now, we are looking into trialling keyless locking systems on a number of sites.

Planting hedges [as per point 2 of 'Other revised rules' section]

The planting of tall growing hedges are no longer allowed as they can cause shading issues and can be a management issue for new tenants who take on a plot with a hedge. Existing hedges are not covered by this rule (i.e. they would not need to be removed), also any new low lavender or Hebe hedges would be allowed, as would tall flowers and grasses.

Management of shared paths [as per point 3 of 'Other revised rules' section]

Shared access across front plots is automatic for tenants who have the rear half of a plot and tenants with front plots must ensure an easily crossable track is kept open for use by tenants on the rear plot. A path should be straight and allow access for a wheelbarrow, so tenants at the rear can manure their plot. If a gate is installed then it should not be locked so that the council and the tenant to the rear can gain access to both front and rear plots.

Sheds and other structures [as per point 5 of 'Other revised rules' section]

The council no longer manages old sheds. You may wish to have a shed or to share one with another tenant and these are personal arrangements that the council should not be involved in.

Tenants are now automatically permitted to undertake the construction of all structures that are in line with allotment rules and structures policy. You may build all sheds, hen houses, glasshouses, cold frames and ponds without the need to apply for permission. It is essential, however, you read and comply with the rules and the structures policy or you may be issued a notice. Please also be aware that structures made from excessive quantities of heavy building materials, such as casement windows, will be in breach of allotment rules.