

Allotment etiquette

Looking after your allotment is a great way to meet new people, many of whom will have a wealth of knowledge about what to grow and how to grow it.

However, with over 1,800 plots across the city, there is also the potential for misunderstanding. Here are a few pointers to help you get off to a good start:

1. Number your plot and always work to the plot boundary map provided.
2. Get to know your neighbours and discuss any issues over boundaries, proposed fencing and new sheds or structures that might affect them.
3. Keep your boundaries neat and tidy.
4. Keep the weeds on your plot to a minimum and prune back trees that might shade your neighbours' beds.
5. Be aware that you are responsible for any visitors to your plot and are only allowed on your plot and the paths that lead to it. Noisy visitors and loud music can cause conflict, so please enjoy your allotment responsibly.
6. Visit your allotment shop or introduce yourself to the association, if you have one. Some sites also have site representatives, who you can meet when you first take on your plot. If you have any issues to raise then get in touch with your representative. Site representatives and associations can pass on tenants' issues to the council and also help the council keep tenants at the heart of their allotments service.

Getting in touch

If you have any questions relating to your allotment or the site in general, please get in touch by emailing info@norwich.gov.uk or calling **0344 980 3333**.

Site representative contact details are available on your site notice boards.

For more details on all of the topics covered here, including policies and the allotment rules, please visit www.norwich.gov.uk/allotments.

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A new tenant's guide to allotment success

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Making a good start

Welcome to our community of allotment holders.

Allotment success is all about making a good start. Whatever the time of year, you need to be working your plot from week one.

In the first few weeks, ideally you need to allow at least four hours a week to work your plot – digging, tidying and preparing to grow.

Cultivation

Digging your plot can be daunting. The best advice is not to over do it on day one, allow several short visits to cultivate your plot and work to a ground plan.

Using the right tools for the job is also important – a mattock (a pickaxe-shaped tool) and a small fork are ideal for digging out clods of earth. Remember, please don't pile clods and soil at the end of your plot – this is your best growing soil so you need to leave it where it is!

Weeds and the chemical conundrum

Many tenants want to have organic plots but one well-timed, careful application of herbicide can make all the difference in the early stages. It can make clearing perennial weeds much easier and will greatly reduce the chance of them coming back.

One chemical-free way of tackling the task is to cover, say, half of your plot with weed membrane, such as Mypex or black plastic. This can be left for a year and then, when you're happy that you have the other half of your plot under control, you can peel back the cover and it should be virtually weed-free underneath.

Clearing

As well as cultivation, you will need to remove any waste materials left by the previous tenant. Hopefully they will have removed their belongings, but some inorganic waste may need clearing and removing from the allotment site.

This clearance can be spread over a few months but please do not burn anything on your plot that is not organic. This is in breach of allotment rules and potentially toxic to your soil as well as upsetting to local residents.

Allotment inspections: how to pass with flying colours

Allotments are inspected regularly throughout the year. Your first inspection will be no sooner than three months after you take on your plot but it is important that you make the most of this time.

At the inspection, the allotments officer will want to see the following:

- ▶ A clearly numbered plot, with markers for your plot boundary.
- ▶ Weeds and long grass under control.
- ▶ Cultivation: around 60% of your plot must be cropped – these crops need to be managed and ideally weed-free, but this can include tree and bush fruit as well as field crops.
- ▶ Woody weeds under control. Brambles and long grass can overhang other plants and cause a hazard, meaning they need to be cut back.
- ▶ A waste-free plot. Only bring materials on site that are needed for growing crops. As a rule, if you don't really need it, don't bring it!
- ▶ A safe site. We will be checking that your plot is safe for you, for inspecting officers and anyone else who may visit your plot.

Our top tips for allotment success

- ▶ Read your rules: your tenancy is tied to the rules – if you breach the rules you may put your tenancy at risk.
- ▶ Follow our plan to 'make a good start' – start to dig, tidy and plant your plot straight away and pass your first inspection.
- ▶ Don't burn any waste in the summer – all fires need to meet the allotment rules and you can only burn certain organic materials.
- ▶ Use a limited area of woven mulch or plastic to control your weeds. Do not use carpet since it is a waste material that can be toxic to the soil.

