

ALSAGER GARDENS ASSOCIATION

Health and Safety Guidance – General Safety for Plot holders

All activities carry an element of risk and allotments are no exception. Everyone needs to take health and safety seriously, but it is also very important to approach the issues sensibly and not become paranoid about the possibility of litigation. New and existing plot holders have a responsibility (duty of care) to anyone on their plot regardless of whether they have been given permission to be there. You should act responsibly and comply with any health and safety instructions provided to you or displayed on site.

Health and safety only becomes unmanageable when responsibilities are neglected.

Allotment sites and the activity of gardening is relatively risk free if people are aware of the hazards and make steps to ensure that themselves, other people and wildlife are not put at risk. Please read and always consider the following points before allotment gardening and have them in mind.

1. Personal safety

Allotment gardeners often spend long periods of time on their own on site, take personal safety seriously and tell another person where you are going and what time you will be back.

- If you have a mobile telephone take it with you.
- Always close and lock the gate behind you upon entering and when leaving the site.
- Be aware of weather conditions that can affect walking surfaces such as paths, hardcore or grass. In sunny weather, take sunscreen to protect you from over exposure to the sun
- you are advised not to attend the site during extremely bad weather, storms and high winds.

2. Physical Exercise

Digging the soil is physically demanding tasks as it involves continued bending and straightening of the back when lifting a spade of soil. It needs to be approached with care and moderation, particularly if you are not used to heavy work. Sensible shoes are essential to save you from a forked foot or worse.

3. Hazardous rubbish

Ensure that you do not leave any hazardous materials on the allotment and that weed killers, fertilisers etc are stored safely and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

4. Tetanus or Lockjaw

This is a serious infection caused by bacterium that lives in the soil and especially manured soil. It enters the body through the tiniest abrasion, scratch, thorn, puncture or cut and a few days or weeks later the illness hits. Please make sure that you have a vaccination that can protect you against tetanus.

5. Skin irritations

Wear gloves and a long-sleeved shirt when pruning plants that can cause skin irritations.

6. Garden tools

Garden tools can be a hazard if they are not stored properly or are left lying around the plot when not in use. For example, upturned spades and forks.

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7. Pesticides and Fertilisers

If you must use chemicals, please keep them to your own plot and do not put them on your neighbour's plot. They may garden organically and will not thank you for it! When using pesticides or fertilisers ensure to follow the manufacturer's instructions and wear suitable clothing. You must ensure that pesticides or fertilisers are disposed of responsibly. Pesticides should never be included in household rubbish, burnt, placed in skips or poured into any kind of drainage system or watercourse. If in doubt, please contact the local Council.

8. First aid kit

A first aid kit is provided on site in the toilet building. If you use any items, please replace them so they are there for others to use.

9. Power Tools

If you are using power tools make sure you have received any required safety and handling training, this may apply to power chainsaws, strimmer's, lawn mowers with metal blades and rotavators. A large rotavator can be a bit of a strain to control, so take a while to get used to it. Power strimmer's, shredders, all have their dangers as well. Always follow the manufactures instructions.

10. Legionella

In very hot weather, especially in green houses, it is possible, although very rare, for Legionella (Legionnaires' Disease) to multiply in warm water to potentially harmful levels. Avoid storing potting media in greenhouses or spraying fine mists

11. Ponds and water

People at most risk of drowning in ponds are children under three years of age. Risk from drowning decreases as a child's age increases and so their understanding of the danger. Children should always be supervised on allotments and must not go on other people's plots without their express permission.

12. Hazards for wildlife on allotments

These include: litter, low-level fruit netting, use of pesticides, open drains, slug pellets, mowing, strimming and broken glass. Certain wildlife e.g. badgers, slowworms, some birds of prey and reptiles have specific legal protection concerning their management. Contact English Nature for advice about protected species. Glass is not allowed on our allotment sites.

13. Vermin

Rats carry about 70 diseases including Weil's Disease, which can cause human death via contaminated water. Plot holders must be vigilant and report any signs of infestation, which include burrows, tracks, droppings and observing the vermin. Contact a member of the committee if any rats are seen.

14. Risk of infection

Humans are at risk of infection from handling animal manure. Always wear gloves when handling any type of manure. Fresh manure should be heaped for 6 months, giving time for e-coli to break down. It is the responsibility of the plot holders for basic hygiene and to check tetanus boosters are up to date. Stopping for a lunch break helps restore energy after lots of digging but don't forget to wash your hands first. Keeping a hand-sterilising gel handy on your plot is a good idea. Always wash your fruit or vegetables thoroughly before eating them.

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