

## **SITE WARDENS**

Site wardens are experienced plot-holders who have volunteered to show people around the vacant plots, offer advice and let the council know about any problems. They are in a good position to advise as they have usually been on site for a while.

## **NOT SURE ABOUT TAKING A PLOT?**

If you are struggling to maintain a small garden then a large allotment may be a step too far at this moment in time. Feel free to speak to the site warden or other plot holders to find out more about the time commitment or start with a very small plot. The council policy is 'Size to Suit' and we are happy to split plots. We want people to have a plot they can easily maintain and cultivate, without stress.

## **GETTING UP AND RUNNING**

The council expects to see good progress fairly quickly so don't take on a plot if you know you won't be able to get onto it for several weeks, especially if the growing season is fast approaching or in full swing.

## **WHERE ELSE TO GO FOR ADVICE**

There is a local allotment organisation: The Cheltenham & District Allotment Holders Association (C&DAHA). They hold meetings with invited speakers and run a discounted seed scheme. Membership is currently £5.00 (annually) and includes public liability insurance and 10% discount at a local garden centre.

Some of the allotment site wardens are members of this group and so will be able to give you further information.

## **EVEN MORE ADVICE**

There are some short video clips on the council's website showing interviews with plot-holders talking about the commitment of having an allotment and offering advice.

The internet is a veritable treasure trove of information about allotments, how to get started, what to grow, how to deal with particular issues and problems etc.

The allotment officer is an experienced allotment gardener (not necessarily very good at growing vegetables but tries hard) and is happy to talk about life on the plot.

## **CONTACTS**

### **Cheltenham Borough Council**

Allotment Officer: 01242 774672

### **Cheltenham & District Allotment Holder's Association**

Colin Smith (Treasurer): 01242 523740

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## **Allotments**

**Things to think about  
when taking on a plot**

**Tips for getting started  
on an allotment**

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

### Time Commitment

Cultivating an allotment can be a rewarding, enjoyable and healthy pursuit. However it requires considerable time and effort (on a regular basis) to prepare the soil, plant and tend crops, control weeds and harvest.

During the spring, summer and autumn, you should set aside several hours each week, over at least two visits. Autumn and winter is the time to get the plot cleared and rough dug in preparation for the following year and you would need to visit at least once a week to harvest any winter crops such as leeks, sprouts, parsnips and broccoli (if growing).

Remember, the time commitment is likely to be much greater at the beginning when you are first getting the plot up and running.

You are also responsible for maintaining sheds and structures on your plot as well as the paths between plots. For grass paths, this means mowing throughout the summer.

### Costs

As well as plot rent and shed hire, there is an administration fee and key deposit to pay in the first year. There will also be the costs associated with tools for cultivation and for mowing paths (can be shared with others), seeds and plants, manure and/or fertiliser.

We do not advise buying a greenhouse, shed or other expensive item until you have had a year on the plot. Many people give up in the first year, so best not to splash out...

### Fertiliser

To ensure good quality crops, you will need to invest in some fertiliser. Compost, manure or plant food will be necessary to replenish the nutrients taken up by previous crops. Some people sow a 'green manure' over the winter but it needs to be dug in promptly before seeding or you will have a new weed!

### Harvesting

Factor in the time to harvest and prepare the fruits of your labour. This needs to be done regularly to get the best of the vegetables; twice weekly for runner beans, once a week for peas and every 2 / 3 days for courgettes.

### Maintenance of the Plot

There is an on-going obligation to maintain the allotment. Weeds should be kept under control and not allowed to set seed or spread. If you are ill or unable to visit your plot for any period of time, you will need to make arrangements until you are able to return. You may have to find a friend or relative to help.

### Rewards

The pleasure of eating fresh vegetables picked in their prime is a great reward for all the effort. You would need to grow quite a lot to see a benefit financially but, for many, the quality is sufficient reward. It is a healthy outdoor activity, offering some peace, fresh air, a sense of community and some great-tasting fruit and vegetables.

## TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

### Clearing the Plot

Strim or cut the weeds down and rough dig the plot. Before digging, some people apply an appropriate weed-killer to get on top of perennial weeds such as bind-weed / couch grass. If used, this should be applied using a watering can (not a spray, due to risk of drift)

### Starting on Clay Soil

Impossible to dig when wet and when dry, can set like concrete. It is very important that the plot gets a rough dig in the autumn. Some people dig little trenches and holes that they fill with compost so that they can make good use of the plot in the first year. Lots of organic matter will be required.

Some people find raised beds are a good option for lower-maintenance gardening but use of growing space should be maximised (large beds, tiny paths, not the other way round...) and you will need a supply of soil.

### Best Crops for a New Plot

Potatoes are a great crop to break up the soil. Some people cover a part of the plot (with a tarpaulin or ground covering fabric) and then dig a small trench or pit at one side and fill it with yummy compost or manure. You can then plant trailing squashes such as pumpkins and butternut squash in it. The weeds are being suppressed while you grow a fine crop of squashes across the plot.

Courgettes and beans crop in abundance and salad leaves are rewarding to grow.