

Harlow Hill Allotment Association

Making the most of your allotment plot

Introduction

The committee of Harlow Hill Allotment Association welcomes you and wishes you many hours of happy gardening.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide some helpful information about gardening at Harlow Hill Allotments and about the key terms and conditions of your tenancy. Your allotment will provide you with the opportunity to produce your own, inexpensive food, take physical exercise, learn new skills and make new friends. Allotments can provide benefits to tenants, communities, the local environment and wildlife.

Harlow Hill is a self-managed allotment site under an agreement with North Yorkshire Council. There is a management committee and three trustees who are also members of the committee.

Harlow Hill is an exposed site, subject to high winds, and based on heavy clay, so it does present some gardening challenges.



Getting Started

- ✓ Make time to draw up a plan for your allotment, thinking about light, shade, ease of access, watering etc.
- ✓ Develop a yearly plan of what you will grow. Use crop rotation to keep the soil healthy.
- ✓ Manure your plot regularly to keep the soil fertile.
- ✓ Ensure the paths between your plot and the next are well-maintained, free from obstacles and kept at least 50cm wide.

Don't try to do too much in one go. Aim for regular and steady progress

Crop rotation

Crop Rotation means not growing the same crop in the same place each year. This reduces disease build up. Another important reason for rotation is to make use of fertiliser left over from the previous crop. For example, the ground should be well-manured for potatoes. If you follow the potatoes with peas, they will crop well.

Lime can be used to control soil acidity, which can be a problem on clay soils. Apply either before the legumes or the brassicas in the rotation.

Lime may help to control club root in brassicas. Never lime in the same year that you fertilise, if you can avoid it, and definitely not in the same couple of months as they cancel each other out.

Other crops suffer fewer soil problems and can be grown wherever is convenient

Geoffrey Smith's Four Year Crop Rotation				
1 =potatoes; 2=peas, beans ,leeks, lettuce; 3=cabbage, winter greens; 4 = carrots, beetroots, turnips, parsnips				
1 st year	1	2	3	4
2 nd Year	2	3	4	1
3 rd Year	3	4	1	2
4 th Year	4	1	2	3

Tools & Equipment

- ✓ Make sure you know how to use tools safely and effectively.
- ✓ Keep your tools clean and sharp.
- ✓ Store your tools in a locked shed or away from the allotment site. Consider security marking your tools to make them easily identifiable.
- ✓ Wear gloves and sturdy footwear. Always wear gloves and wash your hands when handling manure.
- ✓ Only use power tools if you are confident in their use. Read the manufacturer's instructions carefully and always wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including safety goggles. Do not store power tools in your shed.
- ✓ The association has two small mowers in the shed beside the shop and one in the shed on the small site. Plot holders can use these mowers to cut the paths between adjacent plots. Please keep these paths at least 50 cm wide to accommodate this mower. The larger, self-propelled, mowers in the Shop are for cutting the rides, and should only be used by authorised members.

Organising your allotment plot

When you are planning the layout of your plot you may consider including some raised beds. Raised beds are very popular at the moment and are beneficial in the wetter areas at Harlow Hill: some plot holders love them, others prefer a more traditional approach. You will find people on both sides of the argument at Harlow Hill.

For and against raised beds

Pros:

- Raised beds allow easy access to the soil and, as you are not treading on the soil, it doesn't become compacted so plant roots can grow more easily.
- If you have little depth of decent soil, it can be much easier than improving the whole plot.
- If you have an area prone to waterlogging, it can improve drainage.
- You may find them easier to manage if you have a bad back, or other physical limitation

Cons:

- To raise a bed of any size more than an inch or two requires an enormous amount of material.
- Unless you have a waterlogging problem, you will need to water more often.
- Wooden boards around the sides can make the perfect slug and snail hotel next to the restaurant.
- You can have beds which are permanent and never walked upon *without* raising them.

Access to water

Water is essential for plants to grow. It is particularly important that seedlings get sufficient water until they become established and their roots can find their own moisture deeper in the ground.

If you have a shed or a greenhouse, consider setting up a rainwater collection system with water butts. Water containers should be covered and located on stable ground.

The mains water supply on the site is turned on in April and switched off at the end of October. Use mains water sparingly and only when needed. Our site is based on heavy clay, so watering is rarely needed once plants are established. Some plot holders at Harlow Hill tend to water too much.

Your rent includes a water rate, but if you wish to use a hosepipe, you must pay an additional hosepipe fee and you are only permitted to use it for 30 minutes per day.

Composting

Compost is a natural, nutrient-rich, soil-like medium of decayed organic matter. It is a product of the natural breakdown of dead plants and other organic matter such as fruit and vegetable peelings. With time and a little bit of care and attention, this organic matter decomposes with the assistance of microorganisms and earthworms to produce a valuable source of compost. This can improve and enrich the soil, helping to feed your plants and to encourage them to grow strong and healthy. Compost activator, which is on sale in the Allotment Shop will help to speed up decomposition.

Making compost is easy. You can purchase a compost bin specially designed for the purpose or, if you prefer, you can build your own compost bin. You could use reclaimed timber or wooden pallets and four wooden posts to make a bottomless box to contain the compost; covering will also help to retain moisture.

What can I compost?

- ✓ Anything that was once living will compost, but some items are best avoided. **Meat, dairy and cooked food** can attract vermin and **should not be composted**.
- ✓ For best results, use a mixture of types of ingredient. The right balance is something learnt by experience, but a rough guide is to use equal amounts by volume of **greens** (e.g. raw vegetable peelings from the kitchen, soft green prunings, grass cuttings, animal manure from horses or cows) and **browns** (e.g. tough hedge prunings, woody prunings, old bedding plants, cardboard, sawdust)
- ✓ Some things, like grass mowings and soft young weeds, rot quickly. They work as 'activators', getting the composting started, but on their own will decay to a smelly mess.

- ✓ Older and tougher plant material is slower to rot but gives body to the finished compost - and usually makes up the bulk of a compost heap. Woody items decay very slowly; they are best chopped or shredded first, where appropriate.

Leaf Mould

Creating leaf mould is completely free and can help to improve your soil texture, suppress weeds and reduce the need for watering. To create leaf mould gather up autumn leaves (not evergreens and not from roads where they may contain contaminants or under hedges where wildlife may be hibernating) and place them in a big heap. By using four posts and some chicken wire you can create an area that will contain the leaves but still allow air to circulate around them. It will take about two years for most leaves to breakdown fully but digging over occasionally with a fork will help to speed up the process. To use the leaf mould as a mulch spread a thick layer on top of the soil around your plants to suppress weeds (allowing worms to eventually pull it down into the soil) or dig it directly into the soil along with your compost to improve your soil texture.

Green manures

Green manures are usually sown in late summer or autumn and mop up any nutrients, preventing them being washed away by winter rain. When dug in the following spring, they release these nutrients back into the soil. Winter grazing rye is a hardy green manure that will carry on growing all winter before being incorporated back into the soil in spring.

Green manures can also be used to cover bare patches of soil in the spaces between crops, or during intervals between one crop and the next. Fast-growing mustard sown before mid-September can be incorporated in October, for example, or the frosted remains left as mulch.

Summer-grown green manures such as buckwheat and fenugreek form dense foliage that will effectively suppress weeds.

Green manures belonging to the pea and bean family (legumes) have the additional capacity of storing (fixing) nitrogen from the air to their root nodules, but only in summer. Nitrogen is a valuable plant nutrient.

Other benefits of green manures include protection of the soil surface from compaction by rain and shelter for beneficial insects such as ground beetles. *More information on green manures can be found in the Allotment Shop.*

Weeds

- ✓ Keep your plot free from weeds
- ✓ Don't let weeds set seed
- ✓ Cover areas with weed matting until you are ready to work them
- ✓ Annual weeds can be composted, but remove seed heads first
- ✓ Be sure to remove all roots of perennial weeds before composting
- ✓ Mulches and green manures can be used to stop weeds returning.



Annual weeds can be pulled up by hand or by hoeing. **Perennial weeds** are tougher to dislodge and a bit of root left in the ground will regenerate. You can smother perennial weeds by covering them with cardboard, rotting organic matter and then more cardboard; otherwise, hand-dig perennial weeds with a fork.

Pesticides, Herbicides and Inorganic Fertilizers

Glyphosate weed-killers such as Round-up are not permitted on our allotment site. If you have problems with pernicious weeds, please talk to a committee member.

Pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilisers can be hazardous and have environmental implications. **We do not recommend their use.** If you do use them, remember they are not a quick fix and should only be used in specific situations – only use when necessary and always be mindful of the safety instructions on the packaging.

There are useful references to the use of organic and inorganic pesticides in documents on the RHS website <http://www.rhs.org.uk/media/pdfs/advice/pesticides>

Organic or non-organic

Many people are moving towards a more organic approach to gardening. For some people this simply means not using slug pellets or other pesticides. Other people feel more strongly and will use only natural products and materials, buy only organic seed, and the whole idea becomes part of a wider choice to live in harmony with nature. Wherever you fall within the organic spectrum, it is a good idea to try to minimise the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. Consider more organic approaches for the benefit of local wildlife and the wider environment.

Some crops and varieties recommended by plot holders at Harlow Hill

Plant	Variety	Additional Information
Potato	Charlotte, Desiree, Kestrel, Wilja	To minimise slug damage, grow second earlies and harvest last week in July or first week in August.
Leek	Musselburgh, Tadorna, Mammoth	
Onion	Sturon , Santero	Red varieties can be difficult. Growing from seed can reduce the incidence of white rot
Broad Beans	Witkiem manita, Di Monica Aquadulce Claudia planted in Nov and over-wintered give an early crop. Most varieties do well.	
Runner beans	Enorma, Painted Lady Prizewinner, Benchmaster	It is helpful to raise two sets of seedlings in case the first lot are hit by frost after planting out.
Carrots	Early Nantes	Our soil is too heavy for carrots, but you can make a bed especially for them using compost and loamy topsoil.
Beetroot	Boltardy	
Courgettes	Jemmer, Defender	
Parsnips	Countess and Gladiator do well and are disease resistant. Tender and true	
Peas	Hurst Greenshaft Lincoln	Some plot holders raise peas in trays or pots and transplant.
Sprouts	Cascade	
Purple Sprouting broccoli	Red Arrow	Ensure the plants are well-grown by October and protect against birds in the winter.
Raspberries	Autumn Bliss. Glen Ample (summer)	Summer varieties struggle and can be attacked by soil bourn <i>pytophthera</i> .
Gooseberries	Invicta Hinnomaki red	
Blackcurrants, Redcurrants, Rhubarb	All do well.	Rhubarb can be forced for early fruit.

F1 hybrid varieties are very uniform and all plants mature together. This is fine if you are a commercial grower, but for your own consumption you may want plants to mature one by one, so non-hybrids may be better.

In early Spring, cover the soil with polythene to warm it in preparation for sowing.

DON'T PLANT TOO EARLY – Harlow Hill is an exposed site in the North of England, so give the plants a chance. There are no prizes for being early. Consider planting seeds indoors or under glass to give them a good start.

Fruit Trees

If you plant fruit trees on your plot, you must make sure that they are grafted on dwarf rooting stock e.g. M27 for Apples, VVA-1 for Plums. We recommend that you train them as a fan, espalier, cordon, minaret or step-over to keep them contained. Keep your trees well-pruned and don't allow them to overhang the rides or a neighbour's plot. Also ensure that they do not cause excessive shade on neighbouring plots.

Seed Scheme The allotment association takes part in a seed scheme which places an order in October/November each year. The scheme helps to raise funds for the association by means of discounts received for bulk orders, so please support it. These funds are used to reduce plot rents, without them rents for your plot would be higher.

Sheds and Greenhouses

Before you erect a shed or greenhouse you must ask for permission. Forms are available from the Secretary, the Lettings Manager or on our website www.harlowhillaa.org in the Members Area/Policies.

The Garden Shed or Greenhouse:

- must not have a footprint greater than 6 feet x 4 feet (for sheds) 6 feet by 8 feet (for greenhouses), must be on a sound base and **must be adequately secured against strong winds. Greenhouses must be in a sheltered position to avoid damage during strong winds.**
- at its tallest point the shed should be no taller than a conventional shed's apex of 6 feet 9 inches.
- use of permanent materials such as concrete is not allowed.
- must be erected only within your own plot and must not unduly deprive neighbouring plots of sunlight or cause obstruction or inconvenience to other plot holders or access paths.
- must be erected at least 1m from the site boundary.
- must be maintained in good condition

You must not buy or sell any allotment produce from it, nor carry out any trade or business from it.

When you vacate your plot, you must empty the shed/greenhouse and either remove it, or leave it in good condition. You are encouraged to attach a water butt to your shed or greenhouse to collect rainwater. This will help to keep our use of mains water to a minimum, thus reducing our water charges and the impact on plot rental fees and on the environment.

Unfortunately, because of the weather conditions on the site poly-tunnels are not allowed.

Conditions of your tenancy

Your tenancy agreement outlines the rules in full - **please read it**

- Rent is due on 1st February each year. If it is not paid by 28th February, the plot will be repossessed.
- Please notify us if any of your details change (e.g. your address, email)
- Please notify us if you intend to give up your tenancy
- Please **follow the Health & Safety Guidelines.**
- You cannot sub-let your plot or use your plot for any trade or business
- You cannot use any guns on the allotments (including air rifles and shotguns)
- You cannot use barbed wire, razor wire or any other sharp or dangerous object by means of a deterrent on the allotments and you cannot use any material containing asbestos anywhere on the Allotments
- You must compost or remove all refuse arising from the cultivation of the plot.
- You cannot keep animals or birds on the plot. Dogs must be on a lead at all times.
- You must apply to a Committee member or the Plot Lettings' Manager before erecting a shed or greenhouse
- Harvest your crops regularly. Do not allow them to rot on your plot.
- **Bonfires.** All herbaceous plant material should be composted. As far as possible avoid having fires at any time, though, if unavoidable, you may burn **dry, woody** material on your plot as follows:
 - Winter** (October to March) fire out before 12 noon on the first Saturday in each month;
 - Summer** (April to September) fire out before 8:00 a.m. on the first Saturday in each month.

Keep the site secure at all times.

Lock the gate and scramble the lock when you leave.

Site Management

Harlow Hill is a self-managed allotment site subject to an agreement between the trustees and North Yorkshire Council. A proportion of your allotment rent is paid to NYC.

The management committee meets quarterly and an Annual General Meeting is held in March each year. The management committee is responsible for the overall maintenance of the site and ensuring that the conditions of the tenancy agreement are met.

Regular newsletters, emails and the association's Facebook page keep plot holders and associate members up-to-date with matters affecting the site and with events such as our Open Day, the summer picnic, the AGM, work weekends etc.

The Allotment Shop is a focal point of the site to meet up with fellow allotmenters to seek advice and share ideas.

WORK WEEKENDS

A couple of times each year, we ask you to spare a couple of hours to help with the site maintenance on a designated weekend: cutting the hedges, clearing the ditches, helping improve the drainage and generally tidying the site. If everyone gives a couple of hours we can make a real difference.

The Allotment Shop

The Allotment shop stocks a whole range of useful gardening equipment from composts to canes and fertilisers to fleece; all at very competitive prices. Our composts are peat-free!

The shop is open from 10.30 -12.00 every Saturday morning from February - June and September - 16th November and we'll open on 13th July and 10th August. The opening times for the shop are in the newsletter, on the site gates and on our website www.harlowhillaa.org. We also do orders by email once a month. **Please support the Allotment Shop as profits from shop sales help to reduce plot rents.**

Plot and Site Judging

Our allotment site is inspected annually at the beginning of July by two Harrogate & District Allotment Federation judges acting on behalf of Harrogate in Bloom. The judges are given a tour of the site, which includes looking at the plots, chosen by our management committee as the best plots on our site. The judges decide which plot they think is the best and also score our site against the following criteria:

Horticulture

These marks are awarded for cultivation and maintenance.

Range and quality of plants across the plots. A fully-cultivated site with a full range of crops including vegetables, fruit and flowers; well-cared for, colourful and weed-free will score well. **35 marks**

Maintenance – e.g. maintenance of paths, hedges, fences, structures on plots and on site. A tidy, well-maintained site will score well. **10 marks**

Environmental Responsibility

These marks are awarded for promoting biodiversity and sustainability.

Water Harvesting – the prevalence of water butts etc. to collect rainwater **5 marks**

Composting - evidence of compost bins producing compost (not just rubbish piles) **5 marks**

Managed biodiversity – wildlife habitats, evidence of recycle & reuse **10 marks**

Community Participation

These marks reflect the human involvement and social activity.

Events – on site for plot holders (e.g. BBQs, picnics, working parties) and events open to the local community **5 marks**

Communication – evidence of good communication with plot holders e.g. newsletter, regular emails or means of contacting plot holders without email, noticeboards etc. **5 marks**

Community outreach – links with charity groups, schools etc. **5 marks**

Overall Impression

A well-managed, well-maintained and well-cultivated site will create the best impression and achieve the highest marks. **20 marks**

Overall total 100 marks

Sites will identify their top 2/3 plots for the judges to consider for 'top plot'. The judges can consider other plots on the site, but only after they have looked at the plots identified by the site. Marks are awarded as follows:

Horticulture - Crop Variety and quality of crops **30 marks**

Environment - Compost heap, Water harvesting, biodiversity **20 marks**

Maintenance - State of footpaths, structures, cleanliness (weed-free) **20 marks**

Overall impression 30 marks

Overall total 100 marks**Useful references**

Harlow Hill Allotment Association website <http://www.harlowhillaa.org/>

The National Allotment Society <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/>

The Royal Horticultural Society <http://www.rhs.org.uk/> - gives excellent advice on how to grow and look after your vegetables, just search 'Growing xxxxxxx', and select the rhs site. (xxxxxxx is the name of the vegetable).

Garden Organic <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>

There is a small library of books in the Allotment shop, which can be used for reference. E.g. Dr Hessayon's 'The Vegetable and Herb Expert' (many plot holder's bible), which tells you how to grow from seed to table, and even tells you how to cook, store and freeze the vegetables you grow.

Some hard copies of the National Allotment Society's quarterly magazine are available in the Allotment Shop and a link to the e-copy of the magazine is sent out to all plot holders.

HARLOW HILL ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

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ENJOY GARDENING!

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The Allotment Handbook

Sheffield City Council Parks and Countryside

Garden Organic

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>

Mr Smith's Vegetable Garden

Geoffrey Smith

Members of Harlow Hill Allotment Association