

Harlow Hill Allotment Association

Health & Safety Guidelines

Allotment gardening is relatively risk free providing people are aware of the potential hazards and take steps to ensure that they, other people and wildlife are not put at risk. The Committee of the Association has a responsibility to monitor the safety of the site and raise awareness of potential hazards. The Committee carries out its responsibilities by:

- a) taking action to reduce the risk from hazards that are reported to them;
- b) keeping a log book of Health and Safety issues. The log book will be kept in the hut next to the Allotment Shop, so that plot holders can report any issues.
- c) ensuring that all plot holders are aware of their own responsibilities regarding Health and Safety issues

All plot holders have a duty of care towards themselves, fellow plot holders and members of the public who enter the site, whether by invitation or otherwise.

All plot holders should:

- a) ensure that, on their own plots, the risk of injury to themselves and others is minimised.
- b) follow guidelines when working on the rest of the site.

All plot holders are expected to carry out their own Health & Safety checks on a regular basis. They need to identify hazards and risks. A hazard is defined as something with the potential to cause harm while a risk is the likelihood that the hazard will cause damage. Broken glass is a hazard. If it is covered and stored safely the risk of it causing damage is much less than if it is left exposed near to where children play. In addition all plot holders should

- i) report any hazards elsewhere on the site by recording them in the log book provided or by speaking to a member of the Committee;
- ii) ensure that any children for whom they are responsible are made aware of potential dangers and are properly supervised.

All plot holders should be aware of the following advice and requirements:

1. Physical exercise

Digging soil is one of the most physically demanding tasks in gardening as it involves continued bending and straightening of the back. It needs to be approached with care, particularly if you are not used to heavy work.

Sensible shoes are a basic essential if you want to minimise the chances of an accident happening.

2. Hazardous rubbish

Ensure that no broken glass and other hazardous materials are left on the site, in line with the Tenancy Agreement (Clause 5).

3. Tetanus or Lockjaw

Tetanus or Lockjaw is a serious infection caused by bacteria that live in the soil and especially manured soil. It enters the body through the tiniest abrasion, scratch, thorn, puncture or cut and a few days later the illness hits. Please ensure that your vaccinations are up-to-date.

4. Skin irritations

Wear gloves and a long-sleeved shirt when pruning plants that can cause skin irritations. Examples of such plants are ivy, euphorbia and rue.

5. Garden tools

Garden tools can be a hazard if they are not stored properly or left lying around when not in use. Please ensure you store your garden tools safely.

6. Pesticides

A **pesticide** is any substance used to kill, repel, or control certain forms of plant or animal life that are considered to be pests.

Garden Organic (www.gardenorganic.org.uk) provides advice and publications on methods of pest control that do not require pesticides and gardening methods that reduce pest attack.

Plot holders are asked only to use weed-killers **if there is no other alternative**. If they are to be used, plot holders must discuss their plans with a committee member beforehand, must pay attention to weather conditions and ensure no damage is caused to adjacent plots or the rides. (*Tenancy agreement, Further information and conditions, clause 16*).

However, if you have to use pesticides, make sure you wear suitable protective clothing

Ensure that chemicals are kept securely locked in their own cupboard in your shed, away from children and in clearly marked containers. Do not keep them in lemonade bottles or other food containers or leave them lying around your plot.

Please ensure that pesticides are disposed of responsibly. Pesticides should never be included in household rubbish, should never be burnt, placed in skips or poured into any kind of drainage system or watercourse. If in any doubt regarding the safe methods for pesticide disposal please contact the Council.

Many previously used pesticides are now prohibited for domestic use. The RHS website (www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/allotments/allotment-styles/using-chemicals) provides information on using chemicals on allotments and the HSE website

(<https://secure.pesticides.gov.uk/garden/prodsearch.asp>) provides the opportunity to check which pesticides are approved for use.

7. First aid kit

A first aid kit is a wise addition to the tools kept in the garden shed. Example contents:

- A small selection of adhesive plasters
- antiseptic wipes
- a pair of tweezers for removing thorns and splinters
- a gauze or lint pad to use as a compress to stop bleeding if you are badly cut

8. Power Tools

The committee requires all plot holders who use mowers owned by the Association to wear protective clothing and strong footwear. The use of mowers is restricted to plot holders and family members over the age of 16. Young people (16-21 years) should be supervised by an adult.

Plot holders who bring their own tools onto the site do so at their own risk and should take the sensible precautions when using them. The wearing of strong footwear is essential when using all power tools.

9. Legionella

In very hot weather, especially in greenhouses, it is possible, although very rare, for legionella (legionnaire's disease) to multiply in warm water to potentially harmful levels. Avoid storing potting media in greenhouses or spraying fine mists in hot weather.

10. Ponds and water

Ponds that are planned and maintained properly pose a tiny risk, far outweighed by the numerous benefits to wildlife and enjoyment to people of all ages. Plot holders wanting to build their own ponds on their plots should not make them more than 50 centimetres in depth, should build them with sloping sides and should consider covering them if they judge they may pose a potential hazard. Those most at risk of drowning in ponds are children under the age of three. Risk of drowning decreases as a child grows older. However all young children should be supervised at all times while on site and must not go on other member's plots without express permission.

Local Wildlife Trusts, Froglife (www.froglife.org) or Freshwater Habitats Trust (<https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk>) can be contacted about the construction and maintenance of wildlife ponds.

11. Hazards for wildlife on allotments

Hazards for wildlife include litter, low-level fruit netting, use of pesticides, open drains, slug pellets, mowing, strimming, broken glass and pre-stacked bonfires. Certain wildlife, e.g. badgers, slowworms, some birds of prey and reptiles have specific legal protection concerning their management. Contact English Nature (www.naturalengland.org.uk) for advice on protected species.

12. Vermin

Rats carry 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 actual sightings. Particular attention should be paid to waste storage areas and compost bins. The risk is reduced if compost bins are covered.

13. Risk of infection

Humans are at risk of infection from handling animal manure. Fresh manure should be heaped for six months, giving time for e-coli to break down. Plot holders must ensure that they follow basic hygiene guidelines and that they keep their vaccinations up to date. Hand-washing is important before consuming food and drink after working on the site. Using a hand-sterilising gel is recommended. Fruit and vegetables should be thoroughly washed before they are eaten.

14. Covid-19

The virus that causes COVID 19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. Some droplets are too heavy to hang in the air and they quickly fall and contaminate floors and surfaces. Other smaller airborne particles can remain in the air for some time. You can be infected by breathing in the virus if you are within close proximity of a person who has Covid-19.

Do not attend the allotment site if you have coronavirus symptoms or a family member is self-isolating; this includes people who need to isolate after returning from holidays abroad.

Continue to sanitise or wash hands regularly, especially before and after touching communal items such as the gate lock. Do not wash your hands in water troughs.

Communal areas will be subject to regular risk assessment and the committee will agree on specific restrictions for the use of the shop, toilet and shared machinery and the size of/frequency of work parties.

15. Personal Safety

Allotment gardeners often spend long periods of time on their own on site and should, therefore, take precautions to ensure their personal safety. It is important to tell another person where you are going and what time you will be back. Take a mobile phone with you when you go to work your plot. Always lock the gate behind you when you leave the site. Be aware of weather conditions that can affect walking surfaces such as hardcore and grass. Use sunscreen where necessary.

16. 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) on the first Saturday in each month only; fire to be out before 12 noon;

Summer (April to September) on the first Saturday in each month only; fire to be out before 8:00am.

For more information please see the bonfire policy on the website www.harlowhillaa.org.

17. Safety of Structures

Harlow Hill Allotment site is exposed and windy. All plot holders should ensure that any greenhouses, sheds or other structures on their plot are properly anchored and are checked regularly.