



*This lovely mural is displayed on the wall of the trading shed, just as you enter our site. It was created by allotment holders under the expert guidance of Leona Matuszczak*



# GUIDE FOR NEW PLOT HOLDERS



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## WELCOME TO EAST FINCHLEY ALLOTMENTS

You have just become part of a community of gardeners who have been tilling this land since 1916, enjoying fresh produce, fresh air and exercise with a group of like-minded individuals. Our allotment holders come from a wide variety of backgrounds, jobs, and countries and range from youngsters to senior citizens. Their gardening experience varies too from complete beginners to real experts.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF EAST FINCHLEY ALLOTMENTS

In 1916 during the First World War there was pressure on landowners to turn land over to growing food for the war effort. Our site was originally pasture land belonging to the Bishop of London. It was leased to the local Council and turned into allotments in 1917. Our allotment association was set up in 1923 which made it possible to take a lease on the site from the Council with management responsibilities shared between the two bodies. This arrangement continued through a series of leases until 2012 when our association signed a new 38-year lease. The new terms mean that our association has full management responsibility for the site in exchange for a peppercorn rent.

## THE ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Our allotment association is a cooperative registered as a limited company. Each allotment holder is a member. Each year we have an AGM (an annual general meeting) which all allotment holders are eligible to attend to discuss issues and to elect a Committee who oversee all the business of the allotments: tenancies, security, maintenance, finances, and running the trading shed. For more information about our history, including area maps see: [www.eastfinchleyallotments.co.uk](http://www.eastfinchleyallotments.co.uk)

## TRADING SHED

To get started with your new plot you will probably want to visit the trading shed which is situated near the entrance to the site next to the mosaic. News and information can be found on the notice boards just outside the main shed and in the newsletters in a plastic box on the shed door. The shed is open for trading most Sundays between 11am and 1pm (the timetable is on the notice board) and is staffed by volunteers from among the Committee and other plot holders.

The trading shed sells compost, canes, seeds, fertiliser, nettings, slug pellets and much more. Potatoes and onions can be ordered from the shed in the autumn for the following spring. Prices are kept as low as possible, whilst allowing the shed to make a small profit each year.

We also have a small library of reference materials available for gardeners to borrow and have details of where manure can be purchased and



delivered to the site. Many people choose to come and pay their rent at the shed in January and February, although a cheque sent to the Treasurer is also acceptable. Some pop into the shed for advice or just for a chat.

## TOP TIPS FOR NEW ALLOTMENT HOLDERS

### BEFORE YOU START

It is worth doing a bit of homework before you start work on your plot:

Take a good look around the plot and see what's already in place: trees or fruit bushes you may want to keep, piles of rubbish to get rid of, problem areas with brambles, etc. This big picture gives you an idea of how to begin.

Make sure you know where the edges of the plot and the paths are. This helps good relations with the neighbours. If in doubt, ask the tenancy manager.

Walk round the site and see how other people lay out their plots. For example, a traditional open plot with rows of vegetables, or smaller beds divided by paths or stepping stones, or even raised beds. The 'smaller beds' are typically about 1.2m (4') wide and mean you can tend them without walking on them. This makes digging much easier. You could always add sides to make them raised beds later. All this will help you decide what you want to end up with once you have sorted out your plot.

Get a good basic set of tools including spade, fork, hoe, rake, trowel and watering can. The trading shed sometimes has second hand tools available for a modest price and [www.freecycle.org.uk](http://www.freecycle.org.uk) or Gumtree can be good sources for obtaining tools and other equipment.

Get a good gardening handbook to read and keep in your shed. We recommend the widely available *New Vegetable and Herb Expert* by Dr D G Hessayon. It provides straightforward sensible guidance on how to grow most vegetables along with general advice on how to keep your soil in good condition, how to lay out a plot, and much more. There is also a companion volume *The New Fruit Expert* by the same author. RHS vegetable and fruit growing books are also useful.



### GENERAL POINTS TO REMEMBER

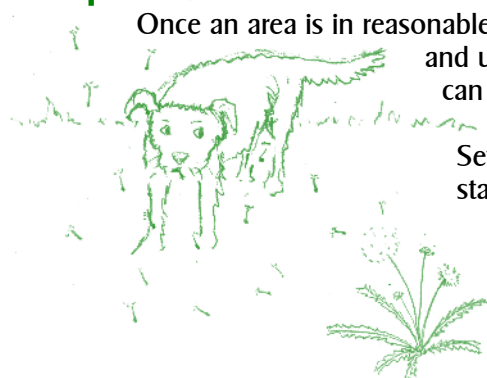
There are a few general principles which, if followed, should help you get off to a good start and make your plot a success:

Whatever you are doing, don't try to do it all at once. If the job seems overwhelming, don't despair: choose a bit you're happy to tackle and do that. Then move on to the next bit. The best way to eat an elephant is a bit at a time!

Don't do too much at one time either. Digging or hacking brambles all day will put your back out, then the plot will run away from you while you recover.

Once an area is in reasonable shape, always try to keep on top of it otherwise the weeds and undergrowth will take over and it will get on top of you. That can be depressing.

Set priorities if there's a lot to do. It's better to start clearing some ground right away so that you can start growing things rather than spending the first three months building a fancy shed while the weeds grow huge and spread their seeds all over the plots next door. You can lose friends that way!



**Wildlife:** We share the site with many birds, hedgehogs, slow worms and many many insects. We would like to encourage even more wildlife. So the committee asks every new allotment holder to set aside a very small area to encourage more diverse wildlife. This could be any or all of the following: a tiny pond, which could be a large sink let into the ground, a log pile for insects and other creatures to hide and breed, or a patch of nettles.

Your allotment neighbours will be willing to give you advice and help. Get to know them and don't be afraid to ask.

Give yourself little treats from time to time, like a picnic or a barbecue on the plot. Get a couple of cheap garden chairs to sit on for a rest or to enjoy a fine day. Having an allotment is about pleasure as well as work.

Make your allotment your own, reflecting your culinary and aesthetic tastes: The beauty of this site is that there is such variety in the different plots.

## **CLEARING A (GROTTY) PLOT**

Many plots are not in a very good state when they change hands, so there may be a lot of clearing out to do. Don't feel depressed or overwhelmed, just do it systematically a bit at a time. When you feel tired – stop! If you start

clearing from the front of the plot, you will be greeted by something you've achieved each time you appear on site rather than facing a jungle that you've yet to tackle.

A helpful general approach is step by step:

Do a first basic clearance of the ground by cutting down the weeds and undergrowth, removing the rubbish, then covering the ground with black plastic or old carpet to stop things growing again. Watch out for nasty rubbish such as broken glass, nails, or sharp bits of slate or china. You can probably do most of the cutting with heavy shears, a sturdy strimmer, scythe, secateurs, or loppers. Several of our allotment holders

have heavy-duty brush-cutters and may be able to help with this sort of clearance. Do this basic clear-and-cover as soon as you reasonably can so that the jungle doesn't go on growing while you dig the first bit.

Then uncover and dig a bit, getting rid of as much bramble and weed root as you can. Either plant it up, put in green manure, or cover it again to stop the weeds coming back.

Plant something easy and quick to grow in your first bit of clear ground. It really makes you feel good to eat something you have grown yourself, even if it's only a radish.

Then dig the next bit and either plant it up or cover it again.

Once you have got an area cleared, dug over and planted, don't ignore it. The weeds will quickly grow again. Go over any open soil with a hoe on a dry day, including between the rows of vegetables, to knock off the weeds while they are still small.

Start a compost heap for ordinary green waste. But don't put pernicious weeds on it such as bindweed, couch grass, or ground elder. They will carry on growing and spread. There's no point in re-cycling a problem. Dry them out for burning in the autumn instead or bag them up and take to the local recycling centre.

Only work the soil when it is fairly dry and crumbly. If you dig when it is waterlogged and muddy it will make it harder to work in future.



Only use a rotavator once you have removed perennial weed roots, otherwise you will just distribute them around so they can grow better!

Work in as much manure as you can right from the start. This will improve your vegetables no end.

## GROWING YOUR CROPS

Gardening on an allotment is different from growing plants in an ordinary garden. Read through the gardening books to see which plants are the most practical for beginners.

Remember that the scale of the operation is much bigger than tending a typical garden and you will need to keep on top of things. *It will probably take an average of eight hours a week to keep your allotment up to scratch*, probably a bit more time in the summer and less in the winter. A couple of hours several times a week is a good way of doing this.

It's a good idea to start by growing the easier crops which give reliable results, rather than plants that are fussy about the soil, the weather or the watering. Don't be too ambitious to start with or you will set yourself up for disappointment.

The following seem to grow reliably on our site: potatoes, carrots, broccoli and relatives, parsnips, rhubarb, currants and gooseberries, raspberries and related plants, runner beans, courgettes, squashes, chard.



It's best to grow things you like to eat, but not too much of anything unless you have a large family to feed. Hessayon's book gives you an idea of how much food you will get from a row or a plant.

Soft fruit such as strawberries, raspberries and currants are good value as are any unusual and heritage varieties which you can't find easily in the supermarket. Your neighbours may offer you cuttings if you are lucky as these can be easily propagated. If you are going on holiday a friendly neighbour will probably water your plot for you if you ask nicely and, of course, reciprocate.

Everything that is newly planted or sown will need regular watering until it is established, especially while it's small. This applies particularly when the weather's dry and sunny or windy.

Watch out for pests and diseases. Our site has lots of slugs and pigeons. We would prefer that you did not use slug pellets, which enter the food chain and harm birds. Beer traps (yoghurt pots or similar sunk into the ground and filled with beer) will trap many many slugs. Crushed eggshells around new plants will make life harder for slugs. (We sell organic pellets in the trading shed which are safe for wildlife). Check online, because several slugs (eg leopard slugs) eat only debris and will not harm your plants. Pigeons love cabbages and the like. Cover the plants with netting right from the start. Lots of birds like soft fruit so net that too when the fruit starts to ripen. You may also need to protect leeks and garlic from allium leaf miner. In general, planting things in small batches with mixed species helps to confuse the pests. Many of us have found that spraying for aphids is unnecessary, and again, harmful to wildlife. Ladybirds and birds will do the job if they are allowed to get on with it.

Please consider growing organically. This is important for the future of our planet. it's worth getting a specialist book about it or there's a wealth of information on the internet.

If you are planting fruit trees, research carefully what you are going to get before buying as there are some exciting varieties out there which are much better than the usual commercial ones. They are best bought on-line, bare rooted in the winter rather than from a garden centre as there is more choice and the plants will be healthier and cheaper. No need to worry about pollination groups as there are so many trees on the site already.





## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

As well as Hessayon's basic books on growing things, there are lots of others published about gardening in general and allotment gardening in particular.

A good monthly magazine is *Kitchen Garden* if you want lots of practical information in a form that's easy to browse through. There's also lots of information on the internet and here is a list of really useful web-sites.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Allotment Vegetable Growing [www.allotment.org.uk](http://www.allotment.org.uk)  
Barnet Council [www.barnet.gov.uk](http://www.barnet.gov.uk)  
Barnet Federation of Horticultural Societies [www.bfahs.org.uk](http://www.bfahs.org.uk)  
BBC Gardeners World [www.gardenersworld.com](http://www.gardenersworld.com)  
Composting [www.recyclenow.com/compost/](http://www.recyclenow.com/compost/)  
Dobies seed merchants [www.dobies.co.uk](http://www.dobies.co.uk)  
East Finchley Allotments [www.eastfinchleyallotments.co.uk](http://www.eastfinchleyallotments.co.uk)  
Garden Organic [www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk)  
Herbs (Jekka McVicar) [www.jekkasherbfarm.com](http://www.jekkasherbfarm.com)  
Kings Seeds [www.kingsseeds.com](http://www.kingsseeds.com)  
Marshalls Seeds [www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk](http://www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk)  
National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners [www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk)  
Royal Horticultural Society [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)  
Suttons Seeds [www.suttons.co.uk](http://www.suttons.co.uk)  
Thompson & Morgan seed merchants [www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com)



## GENERAL NOTES & ADVICE

**Paying your rent.** The rent for all allotments is due at the beginning of January each year and must be paid by the middle of February or your plot may be at risk. You can pay by cash or cheque payable to *East Finchley Allotment Holders Association Ltd*:

- a) at the trading shed on Sunday mornings between 11am and 1pm from early January;
- b) by sending a cheque to 18 Park Hall Road, N2 9PU.

**Manure deliveries.** Only deliveries of horse manure from Bury Farm, Edgware (tel: 020 8958 2932) are allowed along the narrow left hand road (B and C plots). Other suppliers may deliver to the other plots.

If you're next to a **fence or ditch**, please check the fence for damage and the ditch for blockages regularly. Keep the ditch edges clear and tell a committee member about any problems.

**Rats** live on the site. Don't leave rubbish or food scraps lying about: it gives them nesting places and easy pickings. Don't put cooked food or meat in compost bins.

**Plot numbers.** Put up a label with your plot number on the front of your plot to help everyone find their way around. Paint on a flowerpot will do!

**Toilets.** Always make sure the toilet is left clean after use. Don't put extra water or chemicals or rubbish down: they spoil the composting process.

We get **break-ins** from time to time so don't keep machinery or valuable items in your shed because of the risk of theft. Always keep your valuables with you or locked in your shed while you're on the site. If there's a break-in and items are stolen from your shed or there's damage, you will need to call the police yourself. Phone 101 first, then tell a committee member. We can't report the crime for you.

“ It goes without saying that being considerate and kind to other people on the allotments makes this lovely space better for us all ”



During **School term time**, please avoid driving to or from the site between 08.30 and 09.00 and between 15.30 and 16.00. The barrier will be down to protect the children.

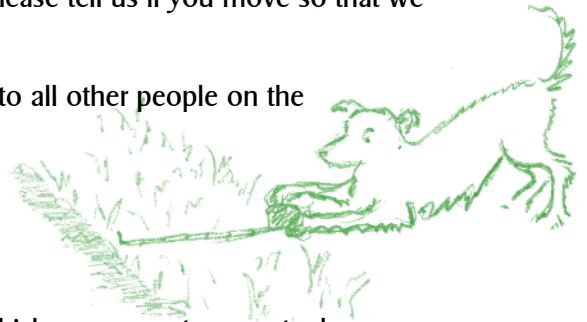
If you find '**danger weeds**' Himalayan Balsam or Japanese Knotweed, (pictures on the notice board outside the trading shed) please check the notice for what to do.

**Junior gardeners:** Please supervise your children and ensure they don't stray onto other plots. There are sharp tools, ponds, water butts and even broken glass on allotment sites. Extra caution must be observed on the roads if they are using cycles or scooters as the dips cause blind spots for cars.

**Problems or complaints.** Contact the admin manager if you have any problems: Cathy Schling email: [schling@btinternet.com](mailto:schling@btinternet.com) tel: 020 7609 1270 or 07748 248 437

**Change of address, telephone number or email.** Please tell us if you move so that we can still contact you.

It goes without saying that being considerate and kind to all other people on the allotments makes this lovely space better for all of us.



## SUMMARY OF RULES

**Our formal Bylaws** are the rules of our Association which you agree to accept when you get your allotment. Read them carefully. Here are some of the key points:

**Your plot** must be kept well cultivated and reasonably free of weeds, and the paths and verges trimmed. We inspect plots regularly and you may be asked to leave if yours isn't up to standard.

**Don't dig on the grass verges** or within 0.5m of the roads. The water pipes run underneath.

**Cut back** (up to a height of at least 2m) any trees and bushes on the edge of your plot so that they are at least 0.5m back from the road.

Don't let **self-sown tree seedlings or saplings** grow on your plot. They will cause problems later on.

**Water is expensive so use it sparingly.** Our site is metered so we *have to pay for all the water we use*. If you use a hose, you *must hold it* while it's running. No sprinklers or irrigation systems are allowed. You may be surcharged if you use water excessively. Please be aware that neighbours may need to water too so only water for 15 minutes intervals so that the pressure doesn't drop for others.

It is illegal to **sell allotment produce** or run a business involving your allotment. You may not **sub-let** your plot.

We would prefer **debris to be removed** and put into the council's green waste system, where it will be composted. **Bonfires** can be burned only at permitted times. See the notice board for details. **Check** carefully that the wind won't blow smoke into nearby houses or into the faces of nearby plot holders before you light up.

If you want to put up a **shed, greenhouse or poly tunnel**, check with the committee first. There are limits on the size of buildings permitted.

You may not put a **fence or hedge** around your plot.

You must not go onto **other people's plots** or take anything from them unless you have permission. **Thieves are evicted.**



Always **keep the gates locked** even if you find them open. Stay with your visitors or delivery people.

**You are responsible** for what your family and friends do on the site.

The **speed limit of 5mph** on the roads is to protect children, pedestrians, the road surface and verges.

**Parking** is only allowed in car parks. Space is limited so park off site if you can. No over-night parking is allowed.

**Don't dump rubbish** or allotment waste anywhere on the site. Try to keep smelly composting vegetation away from your neighbour's picnic area.

**Radios, music players, etc.** must be used with headphones.



**MOST OF ALL: ENJOY YOUR PLOT!**

Written by veteran allotment lags, with logo artwork by Dawn Painter and the doggie drawings by Liz Sheridan