

WIRRAL COUNCIL

**USEFUL INFORMATION FOR WIRRAL
ALLOTMENT PLOT HOLDERS**

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INTRODUCTION

Wirral Council has 46 allotment sites and welcomes all members of the public who want to get involved in allotment gardening as it is a healthy, enjoyable and positive activity.

It is important that new tenants make contact with fellow plot holders and many plot holders will be happy to help and share tips, ideas and allotment produce.

Some sites are 'self-managed' which means the allotment plot holders have a lease from the council to manage the whole allotment site. Plot holders on a self-managed site, should contact the site's committee for any support or advice required.

If a plot is on a Council-managed site and a tenant requires further advice or support after reading this 'useful information' document, the Site Secretary, whose role it is to act as a link between the Council's nominated Parks and Countryside Officer for each site (usually the Local Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team Leader) and the plot holders (tenants) of the particular allotment site. Each site may also have an allotment society which can provide support; in which case the Site Secretary can provide the contact details for that site's allotment society. Additionally the details of a site's Allotments Society (where one exists) may also be found on the site noticeboards.

There are a range of different styles of allotment gardening. Some people want to grow as much fruit and vegetables as possible to reduce the cost of buying produce from supermarkets and other shops. Some people want to grow organically; other people want to use chemicals. Some people focus on growing prize winning produce. Some people want an allotment as a place to keep pigeons or livestock. Other people want to grow flowers or undertake wildlife gardening. Some people want their allotment to be a place where they can simply enjoy a little gardening, pottering outdoors. Within reason any of these activities can be appropriate on an allotment as long as the plot is classed as suitable for the type of activity (e.g. a horticultural or animal plot) and is generally tidy, well cultivated and does not cause a nuisance to other plot holders or neighbouring properties.

Free sources of information for new plot holders include:

- The Wirral Allotment Society, (www.wirralallotmentsociety.org.uk). The society aims to provide advice and support and is open to all plot holders.
- The National Allotment Society (www.nsalg.org.uk). This website includes a section for the less experienced allotment plot holder on what can be done on an allotment on a monthly basis, fruit and vegetable plant profiles and a section on differing growing methods.
- The Allotment Regeneration Initiative website includes a range of fact sheets on practical issues and a plot holders guide covering subjects of interest to plot holders (and people wanting to rent an allotment plot): <http://ari.farmgarden.org.uk/resources>

- It may also be useful to have a look at the courses available through Wirral's Lifelong and Family Learning Service: www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/jobs-and-careers/lifelong-learning/full-course-list

GETTING STARTED

Plot holders should:

- Take time to plan the layout of the plot for ease of use
- Develop a yearly plan of what will be grown
- Consider shade, ease of access, growing space, watering, etc.
- Create narrow planting beds to allow easy access to the soil
- Use crop rotation to keep soil healthy
- Manure the plot regularly to maintain soil fertility
- Use gloves and wash hands after handling manure
- When using fertilisers or pesticides, use according to manufacturer's instructions, and avoid excessive use to prevent contamination or damage of neighbouring plots
- Ensure that there are good paths which are kept clear of hazards and weeds
- Avoiding doing too much in one go but maintain steady and regular progress
- Enjoy their time on their plot
- Share tips, excess produce and ideas with other plot holders

Planning an Allotment

To get off to a good start with an allotment a planned approach and a little determination is all that's needed. Before starting work on a plot, it is recommended that a plan be drawn up of what the tenant would like to grow and where it should go. Over time plot holders will develop more experience, so they should avoid worrying about changes over time. Any fencing placed around the plot should be a maximum of 1m high.

Drawing up a Plan

When drawing up a plan, the following should be considered:

- Situation and light levels
- Ease of access for maintenance and watering
- Soil condition and drainage
- The space needed for plants to grow and flourish
- Permanent planting areas
- Permanent features such as paths, utilities, buildings, etc.

There are plenty of books and internet resources to help with planning a plot and guidance on the best conditions for different plants to flourish. It is also advised that plot holders could also talk to other allotment tenants or the allotment site's society. Planning ahead will help to organise growing to make the best use of the space available to the tenant throughout the year.

Remember

Only work soil when it is in the right condition – if it sticks to boots it is too wet and will do more harm than good.

Paths and Access

Paths (and communal paths) should be kept clear of vegetation and potential hazards such as tools and discarded rubbish. Maintaining good paths can also make it more difficult for some weeds to spread from one planting area to another. Paths should ideally be wide enough for a wheelbarrow (50cm is a good recommended width) and be as level and even as possible to avoid trip hazards. To manage weeds on paths plot holders may want to put down a weed barrier, such as weed matting, and cover with a durable surface such as wood chip. Materials such as slabs, if neatly laid, can also be appropriate. The plot number must be clearly displayed at the plot entrance or another visible location.

Planting Areas

Planting beds can be any shape or size. Consideration should be given to access by means of paths to ensure that the middle of the planting area can be easily reached. A recommended width is 120cm (4 feet) to enable to reach into the middle from both sides. It is advised that weeds be removed entirely from the planting area and that the soil should be dug over. The prongs of a fork should eventually go easily into the bed to turn the soil, and it should be ensured that any larger stones or debris are removed so as not to impede plant growth. The edges of planting areas can be marked with wood or other suitable materials (avoid the use of wood with toxic preservatives such as creosote) to help prevent accidental walking on the area and compaction of the soil. A useful tip is to work off a plank to spread weight.

Raised Beds

The height of the planting area should also be considered. For people with disabilities or back pain, raised beds can be more accessible. Raised beds are also useful if a plot has drainage or if the soil type on the ground is incorrect for a specific type of plant or crop, and additional soil needs to be taken to the plot to enable it to grow.

Greenhouses and Sheds

Tenants may have one or more greenhouses or potting sheds on a plot as long as they do not dominate the plot, cause excessive shading of nearby plots or cause a nuisance to neighbouring properties. Responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of these structures rests with the plot holder. Structures which are not maintained to a sufficient standard must be removed and any waste materials must not be left on site.

Crop Rotation

Crop rotation involves dividing crops into three groups based on their preferred growing conditions. Each group is planted in a separate bed and each year the groups are moved to a different bed. In this way no crop should return to the same piece of ground for three or four years. It is recommended that tenants use the crop rotation method to avoid the build-up of pests and diseases and to keep soil in good condition. More detailed information about how to do this can be found on the internet or in any good 'Grow Your Own' or other gardening books.

CULTIVATION:

Where to Begin

It is a requirement of the tenancy agreement that a plot must be kept in a good state of cultivation. If a tenant has no prior experience of gardening then it is advisable to learn whilst doing. There is lots of advice available from books and websites. Good starting crops are potatoes, peas, runner beans, French beans, salads, onions, beetroot, courgettes and squashes.

Tenants can also consider attending a vegetable growing course. Wirral Environmental Network runs gardening courses throughout the year at Falkland Road, Wallasey, CH44 8ER (Tel: 0151 639 2121): www.wirralenvironmentalnetwork.org.uk).

New plot holders should make contact with other tenants or their allotment site's society. Advice is also available on www.allotment-garden.org, which includes practical month by month advice for allotment holders, or on the National Allotments Society's website (www.nsalg.org.uk).

Steps towards Cultivation

After 3 months it is expected that sections of the plot are cleared and dug over. After 6 months it is expected that crops are in place and the plot substantially dug, or uncultivated areas covered with weed fabric. By the end of the first year of tenancy it is expected that the plot be in a good state of cultivation. If a tenant has issues achieving this, they should make contact with the Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team.

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 micro-organisms and earthworms to produce a valuable source of compost. This can improve and enrich the soil, helping to feed plants and to encourage them to grow strong and healthy.

- Compost will help to save money, improve soil, help to grow healthy, strong plants and look after the environment
- It is recommended that tenants compost as much green waste as is possible.
- Creating a leaf mulch will improve soil texture
- If composting perennial weeds ensure the roots/plants have been destroyed and seed heads removed first
- Do not compost any animal products or cooked food, as this may attract vermin and possibly harmful bacteria
- Always use gloves and wash hands after handling compost

Making compost is not hard. The easiest method is to purchase a compost bin specially designed for the purpose. Wirral Council actively promote composting and offer free “Get Composting!” workshops to beginners as well as a range of subsidised compost bins and food caddies. Visit www.wirral.gov.uk/composting for more information. Plot holders may also build their own compost bins, by containing a heap using reclaimed timber and four wooden posts to create a bottomless box, and covering to retain moisture. Alternatively, all leftover organic matter can be heaped into a pile in the corner of the plot, however, this method looks less attractive, can suffer from a lack of firmness and can lose the heat generated internally unless covered. Digging or ‘turning’ compost occasionally will help to speed up the process.

Leaf Mulch

Creating leaf mulch (leaf mould) is completely free and can help to improve soil texture, suppress weeds and reduce the need for watering. To create leaf mulch 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 it is possible to 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 mulch spread a thick layer on top of the soil around plants to suppress weeds (allowing worms to eventually pull it down into the soil) or dig it directly into the soil (with compost) to improve soil texture.

ORGANIC & NON-ORGANIC

- Organic methods can benefit a plot, the environment and wildlife
- Tenants should focus on improving and maintaining soil fertility
- Companion planting can repel pests and encourage beneficial insects
- Expert advice can be sought from a local library or internet
- Minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers
- When using pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, use according with the manufactures' instructions, wear appropriate protective clothing and avoid excessive use

Growing Organically

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 lifestyle choice to live in harmony with nature. Wirral Council advises all allotment holders to try to minimise their use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and encourages plot holders to consider more organic approaches for the benefit of local wildlife and the wider environment.

Expert Advice

Courses on how to grow fruit and vegetables are available locally, for example at Ness Botanic Gardens. There is also plenty of useful advice available in books and on internet sites.

- Ness Botanic Gardens: www.nessgardens.org.uk
- Royal Horticultural Society: www.rhs.org.uk/growyourown
- Garden Organic: www.gardenorganic.co.uk
- Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens: www.farmgarden.org.uk/publications

Regular Weeding

To keep on top of weeds, a plot needs to be visited frequently, especially during the main growing season, and make weeding a regular task. Digging over the ground and removing roots is the only really effective organic way to remove weeds but other methods can help.

Mulches

Examples of mulches are compost and leaf mould, all of which need to be applied in a layer 52mm to 75mm (2-3 inches) thick. Placed on top of the soil, surrounding plants or over weed matting, these will act as an effective weed suppressor.

Disposing Of Weeds

Annual weeds can be composted (avoiding seed heads) but roots of perennial weeds will grow again if they are composted before they are killed. Perennial weeds can be soaked in water for 3 months before composting to overcome this problem. The

Internet or a good gardening book can help to identify common annual and perennial weeds. Vegetation should only be burnt (at the appropriate times) if absolutely necessary, please read the selection on 'Bonfires' first.

How to Weed Safely

Plot holders should:

- Tackle weeding in stages
- Use appropriate, sharp and well-maintained tools
- Be aware of plant species that cause irritation or are poisonous
- Wear suitable clothing, including gloves and long sleeves
- Not use old carpet to suppress weeds – it is difficult to remove and can potentially leach hazardous chemicals into the soil
- Remember that vegetation which has grown out of control can hide hazards such as potholes, bricks, rubbish, glass, etc.
- Check for and remove any hazards hidden in the vegetation when strimming
- Use weed killers only when needed and always sparingly

Plot holders using herbicides or weed killers should follow the additional safety advice:

- Always keep products in their original containers
- Use only for the specific purpose indicated on the product label and follow instructions carefully
- Measure amounts carefully for maximum effectiveness and use only the amount required for that application
- Use personal protective clothing and gloves
- Wash hands after use and wash off any splashes immediately
- Store out of the reach of children and locked away securely
- Ensure that there is no contamination of neighbouring plots or local watercourses via airborne drift or improper disposal
- Contact waste management and recycling centre for disposal advice
- Check old products to see if they have been banned

Watering

Plot holders are encouraged to use water sparingly, to both help the environment and save money. Water meters will be introduced to sites when appropriate to encourage responsible use of water.

The list below shows several ways in water can be saved on allotment plots:

- Water carefully, either in the cool of the morning or at night, making sure the water gets to the roots of the plant
- Grass should be allowed to grow longer in order for it to stay greener. If cutting is necessary, it is recommended that grass be cut to a minimum height of 2 inches
- Do not use sprinklers as in one hour they consume a considerable amount of water
- Use manure and compost to help retain soil moisture
- Mulch using a layer of tree bark, gravel and compost (minimum depth 3 inches / 7.5cm) onto the top of damp soil. This will provide protection from the sun and reduce moisture loss

- Use a watering can to monitor the amount of water given to each plant. Placing a finger over the spout of the can, to help direct the water to the roots
- Water in new plants thoroughly - but not too much afterwards. This will encourage a deep root system and get the most benefit from soil moisture
- Hoe regularly to remove weeds, as they will take precious water from the soil. This will also help to create a dust mulch
- Do not over water herbs - many come from hot climates so can endure long hot spells
- Spray and water regularly with a seaweed based fertiliser, it will help plants that are under stress
- Collect rainwater via guttering from the roof of a shed or greenhouse one is available
- Recycle water where possible, e.g. if washing plant pots, water can be re-used for the plants

LIVESTOCK, PIGEONS AND ANIMALS

Written permission and a signed agreement are needed before keeping chickens and fowl, rabbits, bees or pigeons. Due to noise issues; cockerels are not allowed to be kept. Keeping other animals on an allotment is not allowed.

Wirral Council has the right to inspect livestock at any time and access to animal plots must be provided for inspections.

The plot holder is responsible for the care and welfare of animals on the plot and it is important that expert veterinary advice is obtained at an early stage in relation to both good husbandry and disease prevention. All animal and bird husbandry on a plot is covered by the Animal Welfare Act which makes it clear that the keeper is responsible for the feeding and care of the animals. The plot holder is also responsible for any nuisance, health risks or damage caused by livestock.

When inspecting plots with livestock or pigeons on them Wirral Council will consider the suitability of housing and the welfare of the animal/birds. When writing to Wirral Council for permission to keep livestock or pigeons, plot holders will be advised on what type of facilities and housing are acceptable.

Chickens and Rabbits

Provided that 75% of the plot is used for growing vegetables and fruit, tenants are usually allowed to keep chickens (hens, no cockerels) and/or rabbits. There may be a local (site specific) restriction on the keeping of livestock on certain sites.

Failure to apply and register livestock or meet the minimum standards in these guidelines may result in the termination of allotment tenancies.

When keeping poultry on an allotment, plot holders must check on them daily, provide competent care and management and have the knowledge and skills to ensure the wellbeing of their animals. In addition, plot holders are also expected to keep them under proper control to avoid disturbance to others. It is strongly recommend that further detailed guidance is sought on keeping poultry.

Chickens should have **continuous and plentiful** access to;

- Cool, clean and fresh water. In the winter months any water supply on the site may be turned off so the tenant will need to make provision
- Provision of feed of a type appropriate to the age and species of animal, fed in sufficient quantities, and sufficiently frequently, to maintain them in good health and satisfy their nutritional needs
- Insoluble grit to aid digestion
- Foodstuffs should be stored such that it is kept clean, tidy and properly protected from rodents and other pests

In addition to effective containment, housing is also essential to ensure the welfare of birds and should allow the expression of natural behaviours. Although it is advised that plot holders make the housing as large and comfortable as possible, as a minimum, the accommodation will be expected to compromise of:

- A Henhouse must be a fully enclosed, waterproof shelter that provides protection from predators and be:
 - a Minimum size of 2 square feet (0.2m²) per chicken
 - a clean, dry bedding material to absorb moisture and odour (suitable choices are wood shavings or straw)
 - Warmth during the colder months and shade during the summer
 - Adequate ventilation but draught-free
 - Perches for sleeping, approximately 3-5cms wide with rounded corners to enable them to grip
 - Nest boxes for laying eggs
- Outdoor runs should provide the chicken(s) with plenty of space to dig, dust themselves and flap their wings and be a Minimum size of 4 square feet (0.4m²) per chicken
- The Henhouse and the outdoor run should be regularly maintained to a good, tidy standard and free from obvious faults that may cause injury

Tenants will be held responsible for ensuring that livestock is free from distress, pain, injury and disease. Appropriate preventative and/or veterinary treatment should be arranged by the tenant when necessary.

- In order to maintain healthy livestock and reduce odour problems, the run and henhouse should be cleaned a minimum of once a week or more frequently as necessary
- With respect to the above, the deep litter system is not acceptable on Wirral Council allotments
- Poultry kept on the same ground for more than a month will need regular worming
- Poultry need companionship and should be kept in groups of two or more

Provided that any kept chickens are happy, healthy birds they should not become a nuisance to others. It is important however to be aware of potential problems, such as dirty sites attracting vermin and causing smells.

Please note that due to potential noise problems, Cockerels are not permitted on Wirral Allotments.

Useful Contacts

This handbook only provides some basic guidelines, and it is strongly recommend that further advice be sought. There are numerous organisations, books and internet sites which offer more detailed information on how to enjoy and care for chickens.

www.poultryclub.org

www.domesticfowl.co.uk

Pigeons

Pigeon-keeping is only permitted at specially designated sites.

Keeping Livestock and Pigeons

Keeping livestock or pigeons on a plot can be costly and tenants are responsible for the care, welfare, nuisance, health risks or damage caused. In order to keep chickens, fowl, rabbits or pigeons, plot holders must have:

- Knowledge, training or experience concerning physical/ behavioural needs, appropriate diet, recognising injury/disease and when vet assistance is needed, handling animals safely, carrying out daily hygiene tasks, etc.
- The ability, time and money to ensure welfare and care needs are met
- Approved and secure housing providing the right type of living environment
- Storage for food away from the plot or in a metal bin, to avoid attracting rats
- A good understanding of personal safety and hygiene
- Availability as a 24 hour emergency contact with site secretary
- Suitable insurance
- Support from neighbours
- Awareness of, and willingness to comply with, animal welfare regulations

Please be aware that legislation and policies with regards to livestock and pigeons are subject to change. Plot holders must comply with all current legislation and regulations. If there is an interest in keeping livestock or pigeons please contact the Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team at an early stage to discuss current policy and any local restrictions that may apply. It should be noted that written permission is always needed.

KEEPING BEES

Beekeeping

Bee keeping can be a very positive activity, helping with pollination and providing honey. All plot holders are encouraged to grow suitable plants to support pollinators and exercise restraint in the use of pesticides.

To ensure the good welfare of the bees and avoid difficulties for neighbours, it is a requirement that plot holders who want to keep bees to attend a British Bee Keeping Association certificated course.

Consent

Beekeepers are required to join a beekeeping association to obtain suitable liability and disease insurance.

Bees shall not be kept on any allotment until the tenant has received permission from the Wirral Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team. Applications should be submitting in writing enclosing a copy of their British Bee Keeping Association (BBKA) course certificate and details of their public liability insurance.

The Nominated Parks, Allotments and Countryside local team leader will then carry out an inspection of the site together with the tenant, site secretary and a representative of the British Bee Keeping Association with a view to permitting the application.

The tenant must ensure that other allotment holders, particularly those nearby, are in agreement with them keeping bees which will also help to reassure them that they will be safe.

Duty of Care

Allotment beekeeping needs the co-operation of tenants to avoid problems. Keeping bees requires the tenant to attend a BBKA (British Bee Keeping Association) accredited basic examination course or similar and must hold a course certificate to confirm this.

Hives must be well placed with thought to avoid the bees flying towards paths, roads and where possible the entrance to the hive should be placed facing south east as this helps the bees to become active earlier in the day. Tenants must, where appropriate, provide screening around the hive ensuring that the entrance is open to aid and direct the bee's flight path.

Allotments with bee hives must place a suitable notice with the beekeepers name and contact details (phone numbers) in case of emergencies.

Insurance

The tenant beekeeper must provide evidence of public liability insurance in respect of their beekeeping activities to the Nominated Officer.

Bee Hives

Tenants can only keep two hives on their allotment, which may increase up to a maximum of 4 hives in the in the course of normal beekeeping season and must reduce to 2 hives for the winter.

Swarming

Most honey bee colonies try to swarm; this is a crucial reproductive activity for honey bees. The tenant as beekeeper must inspect the bees regularly during the swarming season, which can be between April and September. The beekeeper should advise other tenants of the allotments about this procedure to ensure they are aware of any risk.

If the bees do swarm, tenants should be advised not to be unduly alarmed as the bees normally settle down after one hour or so and can be recaptured once they have settled. Honey bees are not additionally aggressive when they swarm and should not be confused with “killer bees” known as Africanised honey bees.

Water

Bees need water in the flying season and it may need the co-operation of other allotment holders to temporarily cover over ponds to alter their flight path. Bees prefer old/dirty water and water carriers may be attracted to ponds or other water sources on the allotments.

Unattended Hives

Beekeepers must not use allotments as storage space for equipment that does not contain bees. If a plot holder is away on holiday or unable to visit then they must ensure their bees are being looked after and inspected regularly in the swarming season. Plot holders must provide details of this person to the Nominated Officer.

Stings

In general, bees will only sting if provoked or to defend their nest. The following can increase the risk of stings and should be avoided wherever possible:

- Bees do not like the smell of beer, gin etc., especially on people
- Leather clothing such as watchstraps or motorcycle ‘leathers’ upsets bees because of the animal smell
- Bees regard dark hairy clothing as a threat; it looks like a bear to them
- Many soaps, shampoos and clothing treated with fabric conditioner smell very like flowers and attract bees
- Bees sometimes regard sudden movements as a sign of aggression. To deal with a trouble-some bee, move slowly towards a hedge or tree. Eventually the bee will go away
- Bees can recognise flicker and can be attracted to a person’s eyes when they blink

First Aid for stings

If a person is stung, they should:

- Move away from the area where the bees are, as the sting produces Pheromones (smells) that attracts other bees to sting
- Remove the sting by scraping it with a finger nail or a sharp object like a pen knife or hive tool
- If, when stung, the individual feels dizzy, they should seek medical advice
- Fainting or collapse, individuals will require first aid and an ambulance
- Remove rings if stung on the hand
- Children, if stung, should be observed for an hour for adverse effects

Diseases

The tenant bee keeper must register all hives with National Bee Unit (go to www.nationalbeeunit.com to register). If the tenant suspects the bees have a notifiable disease they must legally inform the government's National Bee Unit (www.nationalbeeunit.com) and through them, the local Seasonal Bee Inspector/Regional Inspector.

Withdrawal of Consent

The Council may withdraw the permission to keep bees, giving 14 days notice to remove the hives if:

- The tenant beekeeper contravenes any of the above conditions
- The tenant beekeeper contravenes any conditions within the Allotment Tenancy Agreement
- Substantiated information is received that requires a review of the arrangements
- A new allotment tenant takes a nearby plot then provides medical evidence that they are allergic to bee stings

Further Information

- British Bee Keeping Association: www.bbka.org.uk
- Liverpool Beekeepers: <http://www.liverpoolbeekeepers.co.uk>
- Cheshire (inch Wirral) Beekeepers Association: www.cheshire-bka.co.uk
- Beginners Bee Keeping: www.beginningbeekeeping.com
- Bee Keeping the Natural Way: www.bee-keeping.co.uk
- Bee Keeping Questions for Beginners; www.beeginners.info
- The Informed Voice of British Bee Keeping: www.Bee-craft.com/beekeeping
- National Bee Unit Website: www.nationalbeeunit.com

Please be aware that legislation and policies with regards to beekeeping are subject to change and beekeepers must comply with all current legislation and regulations. If a plot holder would like to keep bees, it is advised that they contact the Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team to discuss current policy and any local restrictions that may apply. It should be noted that written permission is always needed.

WILDLIFE

Beneficial Wildlife

Allotments provide a range of habitats for birds, small mammals, amphibians and insects to name but a few. Many animals are beneficial to gardeners as they prey on pests such as aphids, slugs and snails. As far as possible, tenants should look to share their allotments with local wildlife. Birds can be encouraged with nest boxes and feeders placed in trees. Small wildlife ponds will create a habitat for amphibians and insects. Hedges should be checked for nesting birds before being cut.

- Wildlife is often beneficial and should be encouraged
- Creating a small pond is acceptable and can encourage beneficial predators
- Good cultivation and keeping a tidy plot can avoid problems with unwelcome wildlife
- Only use commercial products (poisons, slug pellets, etc.) as a last resort
- Always follow instructions for use when using commercial products

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are good friends for allotment plot holders as they eat snails, slugs and insects. If possible, hedgehogs should be made welcome on plots. For example, have a natural (but neat) log pile. These can be an attractive place for a hedgehog to nest or provide a gathering place for the slugs and beetles that hedgehogs like to eat. It is also advisable to avoid using slug pellets.

Sports or fruit netting should be removed when not in use to prevent hedgehogs becoming entangled, or getting injured. Holes should be covered over and bricks placed at the side of ponds to give hedgehogs a way to escape drowning. Hedgehogs should be checked for before using strimmers or mowers, particularly under hedges where animals may rest. Compost heaps should be checked for nesting hedgehogs before being forked over. Bonfires (if necessary) should be built as close to time of lighting as possible and should be checked thoroughly for hedgehogs before lighting.

Further information on hedgehogs is available at:

- British Hedgehog Preservation Society: www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk
- RSPCA's website: www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/inthewild

Badgers

Badgers and their setts are protected by law. If it is suspected that someone has committed an offence under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, please call the RSPCA 24-hour Cruelty line on 0300 1234 999 - or contact the police.

Foxes

Foxes do help keep down some pests but can cause some disruption to allotment plots. Any disruption can be minimized through good horticultural practice. Wirral Council does not allow or carry out the trapping or killing of foxes on its allotments. It is illegal to poison foxes. It is important not to feed foxes on allotments and action will be

taken if any plot holder is found to be either feeding or poisoning foxes on an allotment. Helpful information about foxes and associated gardening tips are available from the RSPCA's website:

www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/inthewild/foxes

Grey Squirrels

Grey squirrels can be a pest on allotments as they can dig up bulbs, take fruit, steal birds' eggs, gnaw tree bark and eat foliage. It is recommended that they are not fed.

Reporting Wildlife Deaths

The government's Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme looks into the deaths of wildlife where pesticide poisoning may be involved.

Tenants should look out for:

- dead animals like rabbits cut open and staked out as bait
- several dead animals close together, such as rabbits
- animals that have died suddenly for no obvious reason, such as foxes
- eggs in unusual places, possibly with an ink mark

If an animal has been suspected to have been poisoned, or evidence is found of a pesticide that puts wildlife or pets at risk, contact should be made with the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme National Free Hotline on **0800 321 600**. Further information is available at:

www.pesticides.gov.uk/guidance/industries/pesticides/topics/reducing-environmental-impact/wildlife

Trees on Allotments

Fruit trees or other small trees or shrubs can be grown on an allotment, within the bounds of reasonable parameters. For example, select dwarfing rootstock to avoid interfering with neighboring plots and avoid allocate a whole plot to densely spaced trees.

On Council-managed allotment sites, trees that are growing on the allotment site which are not within plots are usually the responsibility of the Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team who will carry out a regular tree survey and carry out work to these trees if required for example for safety reasons, or to allow effective cultivation of plots.

Rubbish and Waste

Allotments are not waste dumps, and it is against rules to bring rubbish on to the site. Plots should be kept as tidy and free of rubbish as possible. Old carpets are not accepted as a suitable form of mulching or covering for compost heaps and are not to be brought onto the allotment site. It is not appropriate for allotment sites to be used by commercial landscape gardeners (large or small) as sites for bulk composting of their green waste material from other locations. If any potentially hazardous material is spotted on a site, or anyone dumping material on the allotment site is seen, contact should be made with the Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team immediately so that

it can be investigated and any necessary action taken. It is recommended that plot holders do not confront any individuals who are dumping waste on site.

Dogs

Wirral Council understands that some plot holders may wish to take dogs with them to allotment sites for company. It is a requirement that dogs are kept on a lead when travelling around allotment sites.

Dogs must also be kept under control on plots, to ensure the safety of neighbouring plot holders and to avoid disturbing activities on neighbouring plots.

COMMUNITY PLOTS

Wirral Borough Council is happy to work with organisations in the provision of Community plots (i.e. a plot which is worked by a number of different people from the local community or a local charitable organisation).

The tenancy agreement for a Community plot will be allocated to a named individual, for example the chair of an allotment site society, a site society, or the name of the nominated representative of a local group or organisation, whichever is the most relevant.

The plot will be subject to the same terms and conditions as a standard individual tenancy agreement, however, if required, changes to a standard tenancy agreement can be considered but will only be made with the prior written agreement of Wirral's Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team.

The Community Plot cannot be sub-let, nor can sections of the Community Plot be charged for without written agreement from the Council.

Keys to the allotment community plot will be issued by the Council in line with the standard arrangements for Council Allotments. In the event that any additional locks are required to control access to a community plot, a key must be given to the Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team to ensure that the Council is able to gain access to the Community Plot at any time.

Community Plots remain the property of Wirral Council and must be cultivated in line with good practice.

CONCLUSION

Allotment gardening is a positive pastime which can be very beneficial for the health of everyone who takes part. It can also be a great way for local people to help each other and support nature and the environment. The Parks, Allotment and Countryside Team commits to the Council's Corporate Vision that good health and an excellent quality of life should be within reach of all who live here.