



## SO, YOU WOULD LIKE AN ALLOTMENT PLOT?

Before you apply for an allotment plot, we ask that you read this note. That way we hope you can get a clearer picture of whether an allotment is suitable for you.

### An Allotment Plot or Something Else?

Think carefully about what type of growing you want to be involved with and how much time you have. Lots of us love the idea of growing our own fruit and veg, getting out in the fresh air and, perhaps, being involved with a community of like-minded individuals. Growing can also be supportive of mental well-being. But you need to consider whether you have the time necessary to have your own allotment plot. If you would like to get involved in growing, but have less time, why not consider alternative options?

If you are lucky enough to have a garden, have you thought about using some space for growing vegetables at home? You can even grow quite a few crops in 'grow bags'. Growing vegetable in your garden is easier and is less of a commitment because it saves travel time and you'll also be able to keep a close eye on things that need watering or weeding or protection from pests!

On the other hand, if your idea of growing is more about involvement with a community, but you don't want the specific responsibility and demands of having your own allotment plot, have you thought about community gardening? There are several community gardens and projects in Leeds [**See Box 1**]. Here you can meet other people, learn a range of gardening skills and get some fresh air. Some of these grow vegetables and fruit. There's more information in the Leeds Green Directory at <https://theleedsgd.wordpress.com/gardens/>

There's also the Kirkstall Valley Farm, a community farm that offers opportunities for people to get involved and learn new skills. More information at <https://kirkstallvalleyfarm.org.uk>

Even if you are keen on an allotment, but think that you don't have time to manage one on your own, why not consider sharing allotment responsibility with other family members or friends to reduce the amount of commitment required.

#### **BOX 1 – Community Gardens**

1. St. Stephen's Well Community Garden, Station Parade, Kirkstall.
2. Bedford Fields Community Forest Garden, Woodhouse Cliff, Woodhouse.
3. Woodhouse Community Garden, 197 Woodhouse Street, Woodhouse.
4. Community Kitchen Garden, Woodhouse More Allotments, Moorland Road, Hyde Park.
5. Chandos Mews Community Gardens, Roundhay.
6. Shepherd's Grove Community Garden, 134 Shepherd's Grove.
7. Quarry Mount Community Garden, 21 Quarry Mount Terrace, Woodhouse.
8. Talbot Fold Community Gardens, Roundhay.
9. Bandstand Community Gardens, Meanwood Road.
10. Horsforth Community Garden, Hall Park, Horsforth
11. Headingley Community Orchard.

## How Much of a Commitment is an Allotment Plot?



in a good state of cultivation throughout the year.

Taking on an allotment plot will require you to work hard – particularly in the early stages as you get the plot established. The time needed depends on the size of the plot and how intensively you want to garden. For a first-timer, we set a maximum limit of half a plot (roughly 8x16 metres or about 125 sq.m.), but you may find a quarter plot (about 62 sq.m. or roughly 8x8 metres) is perfectly adequate. Think very carefully about the size of plot that you can reasonably prepare and maintain

All newly let plots are subject to a three-month probationary period, with a requirement to make certain improvements within that time. When starting out, it is probably best initially to establish about a third of your plot area in the first few weeks. This allows you to see some progress and start growing things relatively quickly. All tenants must successfully complete that probationary period before being accepted for full tenancy. If that is not achieved, unfortunately the Association will have to take the plot back and re-let it.

The Allotment Association is duty-bound to ensure allotment plots are put to good use. Once you have signed the tenancy agreement, you have committed to maintaining the allotment in a good state of cultivation and to keep it clean and free of perennial weeds. This ensures that plots are kept in good condition and that neighbouring plots are not affected by spreading weeds.

## Planning Your New Plot – What are the Challenges?

### Challenge 1 -Your Plot is likely to be in poor condition

The Allotment Association generally does not have the resources to clear plots before re-letting. Most tenants give up their allotment plot because they have struggled to look after it. For that reason the plot you take on may not have been in an uncultivated state for some time and there may be a lot of weeds. You will need to put in some hard work to get the plot into a good condition. You might find that the plot needs plenty of digging to loosen it up to enable you to fork in compost or manure. Think about your level of fitness and how much you can



manage. Dig a bit at a time if you are not used to it and consider using weed suppressants to help manage the sections as they are cleared.

### Challenge 2 – Keeping the weeds at bay

You will be required to keep your plot tidy and reasonably free of perennial weeds and you will need to decide how to manage them. Weeds are persistent so you will need to make regular visits to keep them at bay, especially in the growing season.

### Challenge 3 – Time management

Allotments need regular visits. Have a think about how you would realistically fit this into your routine? Taking on a new allotment can be an exciting opportunity to grow your own fruit and vegetables, meet people and get plenty of fresh air and exercise. However, a certain level of commitment is going to be necessary for it to be successful. More information about this is given in the next section.

### Challenge 4 – Tools and equipment

You will need some garden tools to tend your plot, but the basics don't need to cost a fortune. Consider buying second hand. The Allotment Association may have some old tools available from the site Hut for a small donation.

## **How much time do I need to spend on my allotment?**

This is not an easy question to answer. All gardening is time consuming and needs commitment. How many hours you spend on your plot depends on several factors:

- **The size of your allotment plot** – the largest plot that we offer to new tenants is a half plot (125 sq.m.), but we would highly recommend a quarter plot (62 sq.m.), which may be better if you have a full-time job and a busy life?
- **The condition of your plot when you take it over.** Remember that weed clearing, digging and re-modelling all eat away at the hours.
- **How you plan your plot.** If you're going to make raised beds and paths and build new compost bins you need to factor the time in for building them.
- **How intensively you cultivate it.** Are you going to grow successional crops such as a range of salad leaves in the summer? Are you going to grow crops over the winter such as broad beans, leeks and onions? This will obviously take more time than if you stick to runner beans and potatoes and a few courgette plants.
- **Permanent crops** such as rhubarb, raspberries and other soft fruit, once established, don't require as much time as seasonal vegetables.
- **Some crops need tending less** – onions, potatoes, carrots, leeks, squash, garlic, perpetual spinach, or fruit trees and bushes, although there will be peaks of activity at planting and harvesting time.
- **'Buying-in' plants** can take less time because it removes some of the unpredictability from growing from seed – but this comes at a higher cost.
- **Do you want or need to be away from Leeds for longer periods in the summer** – this is the main growing season, so an allotment may not be

appropriate for you, unless you can manage your crops and harvesting or have a co-plot holder or helper who can look after the plot while you are away.

- **Plots are inspected regularly** and any that are not being cultivated will be sent a letter requesting plots to be returned to cultivation within a certain timescale or the Association will have to take the plot back and re-let it.

Surveys across the country have found that from March to October nearly half plot-holders spend 5-10 hours a week on their plot, with the average visit lasting 2-3 hours each time. But about one third spend more time. This is time necessary to prepare ground, for sowing seeds, for planting and for weeding. In the winter season 2-5 hours a week spent on the plot is typical, but the National Allotment Society considers two hours work each week is the minimum even in winter to keep your plot productive. Lia Leendertz in her book, '*The Half-hour Allotment*' (Royal Horticultural Society) says there are methods that "will enable you to get the best results in half an hour per day, or even less" – but that still works out at 23 days of work a year!

At the very least you will have to visit for several hours a week come rain or shine to ensure your tenancy starts well and to get on top of weeding. In hot weather, you might need to water your crops every day if you have a polytunnel or greenhouse. One survey of allotment holders in Hampshire found that for most plot-holders the main challenges they faced was 'finding time' for their plot – together with weeding and dealing with pests.

### **Don't Forget Harvesting!**

The whole reason to have an allotment is to be able to grow healthy, 'home grown' fruit and vegetables. It may sound obvious, but having an allotment does mean that you – or someone in your household – needs to like cooking and will be able to make use of the food that the allotment provides, thereby replacing at least some of what you currently buy from the supermarket. Typically, you will also find that crops come in gluts – when a lot of a particular crop is ready at one time. Again, to make the best use of your plot think about whether you (or someone in your household) will have the time and interest to process and store the food you grow (picking, cleaning, preparing, blanching, storing, bottling, freezing).

### **Good Luck**

Hopefully, what you have read hasn't discouraged you, but given you more of an insight into what having an allotment involves. At its best an allotment plot will provide you with fresh fruit and vegetables, exercise in the fresh air and the chance to meet with others who enjoy growing. Please do apply for an allotment plot on our Ash Road Allotments site if you are now interested in doing so.

Chris Martin, 20 February 2025