



# Dursley Town Council



## Tips for Gardening Safely on Your Allotment Plot



### **Duty of Care**

Allotment tenants have a duty of care to anyone on their plot, whether invited or otherwise. Remember your allotment plot is your responsibility.

This leaflet has been produced to advise allotment tenants on some ways to help keep themselves and their visitors safe while reaping the benefits of allotment gardening.

### **Personal Safety**

It can be worthwhile taking a moment to consider your personal safety. Does someone know where you are? Do you have a mobile phone with you? Are you the only person on the site? Do you have a first aid kit handy, just in case?

### **Physical Exercise**

Gardening can be hard work, especially the digging! Take care of your back and don't try to dig the whole plot in one go. You might like to warm up first and take breaks. Be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses and take extra care with lifting awkward or heavy items.

### **Tools**

Garden tools can be a hazard if they are left lying around or are not stored appropriately. The often quoted example is of someone treading on a rake obscured by long grass. Do have a think about how you might prevent accidents on site. Keep tools well-maintained to be safe to use and store them safely at all times. Remove faulty equipment from the site.

### **Paths**

Allotment tenants are responsible for maintaining the connecting paths around their plots. Keep the paths clear and check for trip hazards (objects, potholes) to help keep things safe.

## **Machinery**

If you are using machinery e.g. rotavator or strimmer. Always follow the instructions in the manual and use any safety devices recommended (e.g. safety goggles, ear-defenders and so on). Be aware that it can take a bit of practise getting used to using a rotavator or strimmer and there is a risk to others from flying debris. Take extra care when other people are around.

## **Clothing**

Gardening in open sandals and shorts might not be the most sensible approach (think garden fork and bare feet...). You might like to consider sensible shoes, especially those with toe protection. Covering up may help protect your skin from the sun, biting insects, scratches, scrapes and from other hazards, which leads us on to.....

## **Plants**

There are several plants to watch out for in the garden and on the allotment. These include some of the more well-known (e.g. nettles, brambles, cow parsley) but there are others too. Did you know that the sap of a parsnip plant left to go to seed can cause nasty blisters if you get it on your skin? Members of the umbelliferous family contain compounds that react with sunlight. Apparently even carrots and celery have been known to cause problems occasionally.

## **Tetanus or Lockjaw**

This is caused by bacteria which live in the soil and manure and enter the body through a cut or wound (even a very tiny one). The illness can be quite serious and can usually be prevented by vaccination. Your GP should be able to give you further information.

## **Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease)**

This is a disease that can be transmitted to humans by contact with the urine of rats and other animals. Do familiarise yourself with the symptoms and make sure you wash your hands before eating or putting your hands to your mouth or face etc.

Rodents can set up home around structures on the allotment site (e.g. sheds and compost bins), anywhere where there is shelter and water. Keep structures in good order, do not store waste or food in sheds and cover water butts. You are responsible for dealing with any pest problem that arises due to your activities on the plot.

## **Pesticides and Chemicals**

Children and animals can be good at getting into things they are not supposed to. Keep all chemicals e.g. fertilizers, wood preservatives, weed killers, in their original containers, clearly marked and locked out of reach. Such items are toxic and can be dangerous to humans, animals and plants. Follow instructions carefully. Better still, go organic!

## **Sharp Objects**

Broken glass and sharp pieces of metal may be hazardous to visitors (and yourself) if left on your allotment plot. Corrugated iron can develop very sharp edges. Please note that the use of barbed wire is not permitted.

## **Bonfires**

Try to compost as much as possible. If you are going to have a bonfire please refer to the Bonfire Guidance leaflet issued by the Council. Fires should never be left unattended. Ensure any fire is properly extinguished to reduce the risk of accident.

## **Structures**

It goes without saying that badly built or damaged structures can be dangerous. You can reduce risk of injury by ensuring that your shed or other structure is sound and any necessary repairs are carried out quickly when required. If you are planning to install a structure on your plot please refer to your tenancy agreement and obtain permission from the Council first.

## **Hazardous Materials**

Historically many building materials contained **asbestos**, it is widely found in roof sheeting, partition boards, water tanks and pipe lagging. Once the material is damaged the fibres can become air borne this is when asbestos is at its most dangerous. If you think you may have asbestos-containing items on your allotment plot seek advice from the Council before you take any action.

Old **carpets** are often used to suppress weed growth on allotment sites across the country, there has however been a move away from use of carpets in recent years. This is because carpets can be difficult to remove, especially if they have been down for a number of years. The foam backing can also break up making it hard to remove from the soil and there are concerns about the dyes and chemicals used washing out into the soil. Weed control fabrics and membranes are just one of the options that offer a safer solution.

## **Water Butts**

Allotment tenants should practise sensible water conservation and avoid using excessive water when watering plots. If you have a water butt please ensure that it is covered. Children and animals can be good at getting into things they are not supposed to. Some bacteria can thrive in water and cause illness. Avoid washing hands and produce in water butts.

## **Children**

Bacteria, machinery, tools, glass, water storage containers, poisonous plants and weed killers are some of the dangerous things children may come into contact with on an allotment site. Parents and guardians must supervise children at all times and they must not visit the plot without an adult. Encourage children to wash their hands after helping on an allotment.

## **Insurance**

Allotment tenants are advised to consider taking out public liability insurance to cover themselves in respect of any claims made against them for injury, loss or damage caused to any person as a result of negligence. Allotment tenants are also advised to make sure that all the activities they will be undertaking on site are covered by any policy they take out. The National Allotment Society can advise on insurance policies.

**The list of hazards above is not exhaustive, there may be many others on an allotment site. If you notice hazards around the site please contact the Council Office to report your concerns.**

## **CONTACTS**

### **Dursley Town Council**

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E-mail: [clerk@dursleytowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@dursleytowncouncil.gov.uk)

Website: [www.dursleytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.dursleytowncouncil.gov.uk)

Visit us at our office, we are open Monday to Friday 10am -3pm.

### **Stroud District Council**

Pest Control: 01453 754478

### **Recycling & Waste Disposal**

[www.recycleforgloucestershire.com](http://www.recycleforgloucestershire.com)

### **Gloucestershire Constabulary**

Non-emergency: 101

Emergency: 999

### **Medical Information**

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Emergency: 999

NHS: 111 (call the number if it is not an emergency situation but you require urgent medical help and advice)

### **The National Allotment Society**

[www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk)

Tel: 01536 266576

Individual allotment tenants can become members of the society. Please note that Dursley Town Council is a member of the society and may be able to access information of interest to you.