

Making the most of your allotment in Watford

Watford has a thriving allotment community, with around 1,300 plots in 12 sites across the town. Whether you are new to allotment gardening or have had a plot for a number of years, there is always something new to learn, or a new fruit or vegetable to grow. Allotment gardening is good for your physical and mental health, providing an ideal opportunity to get outdoors and be active at all times of the year. It is also a great way to meet new people. Allotments are friendly places and other tenants are always happy to share advice on the best things to grow and how to grow it so you can make the best of your plot. Here are a few top tips so that however experienced you are, you will make the most of your allotment and the time spent on your plot.

Keeping it green

Watford's allotments are important refuges for wildlife, including a number of species now sadly scarce in Hertfordshire such as slow worms and Great crested newts. With this in mind, organic cultivation is strongly encouraged.

Making your plot beautiful

- Beans on wigwams, planting of mixed foliage varieties can be very pretty
- Spring flowering clematis can be trained to cover sheds
- Compost bins can be disguised with ornamental plants
- If you have room consider a pond or small wildflower area
- As well as growing fruit and vegetables, grow nectar rich plants that attract pollinating insects eg Phacelia which is a great way to fill bare soil maybe after digging up your potatoes, Verbena, Helenium (Lemon Queen), Lavender, Limnanthes (Poached egg plant), Knautia Macedonica, Borage.



For more ideas look at RHS list of plants for pollinators online. www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators

- Some weeds are useful in small amounts especially in early spring and late summer into Autumn eg dead nettle - red and white, Dandelion
- Raised beds can be a good way to cultivate and keep your plot neat, but consider using good quality treated timber, untreated timber like pallets rot quickly and provide a great place for slugs and snails to live

Practical tips

Share the love - a condition of a tenancy is that at least three quarters of the plot must be under cultivation. Why not get help with your plot from family or friends?

Water wisely - water is now a very precious resource and it's important not to waste it. When watering - water each plant thoroughly but less often. Consider watering early in the morning or later in the evening to prevent evaporation. Plant in shallow trenches so water does not run away. Use mulches around plants to keep soil moist.

Don't stray from the path - good access to your plot is helped by creating paths - this way you can tend and gather your crops easily. Permanent paths between raised beds can be kept weed-free with a membrane or chipped wood.

Crop rotation - move plant families around plot so not growing the same crop in same area in successive years, this helps prevent pests and diseases.

Dig it in - composting recycles nutrients and adds organic matter to the soil- this helps plants grow and feeds the invertebrates and soil organisms that keep the soil healthy. It also helps the soil hold more moisture making your plot less susceptible to drought.

No dig - this way of gardening, where you don't use a fork or spade to disturb or loosen the soil in any way, can be good for soil as well as the environment.

Mix it up - mixing up plants growing side by side confuses insect pests, especially strong-smelling plants like French Marigolds next to vulnerable crops like carrots- this is also known as companion planting.

Intercrop - Sow and harvest a fast-growing crop between a widely spaced slow growing crop e.g lettuce between your Brussels sprouts.

Protect your crop - this will boost growth and exclude pests. Agricultural fleece or Environmesh provide extra warmth and shelter from wind, cloches do a similar job.

Keep it tidy (and rat free) - make sure compost areas are contained (and properly constructed) if any food waste is going in. If you keep chickens do not leave feed on the ground.

Keep it clean - wear gardening gloves if you can but always wash your hands after being on the allotment. Rinse your tools and shake the excess soil from your boots after each allotment visit.

Wash it well - give the fruits (and veg) of your labour a jolly good rinse in running water before cooking and eating removing all soils just as you would do if bought from a supermarket.

Watford allotment sites

North Watford - Briar Road, Callowland off Legatts way, Cherry tree off Berry Avenue, Garston Manor off Horseshoe Lane.

Central Watford - Tavistock Road, Timberlake off Radlett Road.

West Watford - Chester Road, Brightwell off Scammel way, Holywell off Vicarage Road.

South Watford - Paddock Road, Oxhey Grange off Oxhey Avenue, Wiggenthall off Longcroft.

11 of these sites are managed by Veolia on behalf of Watford Borough Council, Cherry Tree allotments is self-managed by the Cherry Tree allotment association.

Further information

National Allotment Society

National allotment association, offers support and advice
www.nsalg.org.uk

Royal Horticultural Society

Huge amounts of gardening advice and information
www.rhs.org.uk

Garden organic

Specialises in organic growing
www.gardenorganic.org.uk

No dig gardening

If you are interested in no dig gardening Charles Dowding is the leading gardener in this type of growing.
www.charlesdowding.co.uk
www.youtube.com/@CharlesDowding1nodig

Advice and support

Please contact Allotment Officer- Robert Hopkins [07884 410161](tel:07884410161) / robert.hopkins@veolia.com

Finally, if you get a chance have a look at our Facebook page Watford Allotments sharing successful growing ideas and tips on growing your own produce in Watford.

www.facebook.com/groups/2665336323705598

