



GOOLE TOWN COUNCIL

Things to consider before you apply for an allotment:

Now you have decided to grow your own vegetables the information below should help you to decide what is the best way for you to get the maximum benefit from your new lifestyle. Taking on an allotment can be both challenging and rewarding and there are a few things you need to consider before you start.

Benefits of an allotment:

We all know the value of fresh vegetables and many people think that nothing compares to the taste and texture of fresh home grown produce. As a bonus producing your own food can also provide you with plenty of healthy exercise and can be important for improving feelings of physical and mental well being. In addition, because food is not farmed on a large scale or transported over distances there is considerable evidence to suggest that its better for the environment too – even so when grown organically!

Things to think about:

New allotment holders find that they quickly develop new skills and knowledge and many plot holders see the development of their allotment as part of a positive lifestyle choice. However there are few things to think about before you rush into getting your first plot and potential challenges are outlined below.

1. Clearing a plot

When tenants take on a new plot it may be after a lengthy process of removing the existing tenant and offering the plot to other people. This can mean that a plot has been left un-worked over for several months and in the summer months this can mean that the site is unrecognisable! Be prepared for lots of hard work to clear the plot and bear in mind that you are unlikely to be able to grow any produce for the first six months, often for the first year, as you prepare the ground. There are ways of making clearing a plot easier, for example by using power tools, but ultimately the whole site will have to be cleared.

2. Health and physical ability

Considering the above, if you feel you may not be able to meet the physical demands of a plot of your own then you may want to consider sharing with someone you know. Alternatively contact us to look at other options such as a half size plot or a community growing project where you can grow as part of a team of volunteers and share the produce. Please consider your health very carefully as it can be very disheartening for tenants to take on more than they can actually manage.

3. Managing weeds

All plants, given the right conditions, want to grow and weeds are no exception! Again there is plenty that you can do try and reduce the number of weeds on your plot, such as digging over the ground and removing roots or by using weed matting to cover areas of the surface such as paths, but weeds are a persistent problem and will require physical effort and patience to remove. To keep on top of weeds you need to ensure that you can make regular visits to a plot, especially during the main growing season.

4. Time commitment

You do need to think about whether you have a regular amount of time that you can commit each week to work a plot. We recommend visiting plots at least twice a week to stay on top of weeding and other jobs. The number of visits you make during the growing season, to water and harvest crops, for example, may be considerably more than this and if you don't have an effective watering system you may find during very hot or dry weather that you have to visit daily! If you work full time or have other commitments be realistic about the amount of time you have available and the distance you need to travel to your plot.

5. Tools and equipment

You will need some tools and equipment to work your plot and if you are buying new there will be a cost involved. You may be able to share tools with other tenants and some allotment societies have tools available for tenants to use. You could also recycle by buying second hand tools. We don't recommend leaving tools on site so if your chosen allotment site is not close to home you will need to consider how you will transport your tools.

6. Children

Many young children are very enthusiastic about growing things and allotments can be a great place for children to learn. However there are things you need to consider – an allotment plot, particularly one that has not been worked for a while, may have some safety issues you need to address before taking young children onto the plot (broken glass, weeds such as bramble or stinging nettles etc). Please bear in mind that although you may be very committed a young child may lose interest very quickly – you need to consider what you can do if your child is not as interested as you!

7. Size of your plot

Where time, health or other reasons mean that you do not want to take on a full size plot then a half size plot may be possible on your chosen site. We try to accommodate requests for half size plots wherever we can. If even a half size plot seems a bit ambitious then think about joining a community growing project or try growing at home in containers and window boxes – an adequate amount of veg for two people can easily be grown in a relatively small space.

8. Learning what to do and when

If you have not grown vegetables before then you will probably need to learn as you go along. There is lots of advice available from books and websites and also from other tenants who are often very willing to give advice. While you are waiting to be offered a plot you could try researching books and websites, attending a vegetable growing course or even getting in touch with the local allotment association for advice.

9. Crop failures

If you are new to vegetable growing it is inevitable that you will have the occasional crop failure and you need to be prepared for this. Successful tenants see this as a learning opportunity but it can be very disheartening after all the effort you have put in. It takes time to prepare the ground and it is unrealistic to expect to get a whole season's worth of perfect veg during the first year on your plot. As time goes on you will learn more about what grows where and when and in what conditions and the ground will be improved, all of which will increase your chances of success.

10. Maintaining motivation

Having an allotment is definitely an activity for the patient! Maintaining motivation, especially during the first year or so, can be difficult. While you are waiting to be offered a plot you may want to draw up a plan of what you would like to see on your plot so that when you get a plot you can start work towards this. When you have a plot take plenty of photos so you can see how your plot improves and keep referring to your plan to see what you've achieved.