



COLCHESTER
ALLOTMENT
ASSOCIATION

Welcome to Allotment Gardening



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This welcome pack has been put together by the Colchester Allotment Association (CAA) and Colchester Borough Council (CBC) to help new allotment gardeners get started and to get the best from their plot.

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Congratulations on getting your allotment – now the hard work begins!

If you already know what you are doing then you might want to skip some sections of this welcome pack, but if you are a first-time gardener then this will be useful.

Ground

Hopefully you have taken the opportunity to meet your site steward and have visited your allotment plot before taking it on, so you know what condition your plot is in. Many allotment plots are vacated because the outgoing plot holder has been struggling to maintain it, this means that newly let plots are often in an uncultivated state. This doesn't mean that the plot has been uncultivated for years, but maybe a few months and the weeds have grown.

If it is autumn or winter you can turn the ground cover over with a spade and leave it for the weather to break down (although you will need to clear the weeds eventually!) Growing potatoes is good for clearing ground as well.



Once the ground is clear, then rotovating will help to break up the earth into a tilth ready for sowing and planting. This can also be done with a fork and rake. Adding well-rotted manure will help ensure that your plot is fertile.

It is strongly advised that the plot is not cleared by removing 'turfs' from the plots. Good quality topsoil will be removed by doing this and piling these turfs up on another section of the plot will only cause a problem in later years and make the plot uneven. It is best to either use a weedkiller such as glyphosate then dig the plot over, or if you would prefer to avoid chemicals to cover the plot with black plastic to kill the weeds and then dig over sections of the plot removing any remaining weeds (including their roots).

It isn't essential to get your whole plot ready in one go, sometimes it may take as long as a year to get the whole area into production. It is useful to cover un-dug areas of your plot with black plastic or even flattened cardboard boxes as this will suppress weeds and make things easier when you have time to cultivate it seriously. The use of carpets on allotment plots is discouraged to prevent any future maintenance issues and to avoid chemical leaching into the ground.



Cultivation

All new allotment holders are given 3 months to start working their allotment plot before they are subject to cultivation inspections with all other allotment plots. This is to give plot holders a chance to get on top of their new allotment plot.

Plots are considered cultivated when 50% or more of the plot is in productive use, i.e. perennial fruit, flowers or vegetables, or soil is overturned. There should be little or no long vegetation on the allotment plot.

Cultivation inspections are undertaken throughout the growing season (March – October) on an approximate six week basis. Any plot found uncultivated will receive a Notice to Quit with a condition that if the plot is cultivated within 1 month the Notice to Quit will be revoked.

Any plot which receives two Notice to Quit letters for cultivation in a three year period will lose their allotment plot.



If you believe that you fall under one of the valid mitigating circumstances for not cultivating your allotment plot then please contact the Council as soon as possible to discuss the matter. Plot holders are still asked to keep all long vegetation down on their plot until they are able to fully cultivate it again.

Valid mitigating circumstances are....

Hospitalisation for surgery or other serious complaint

A short-term medical complaint where advice has been given by a medical practitioner that physical work is not advisable

Death of a close family member (partner, parent, offspring or sibling)

Ensuring that allotment plots are fully cultivated is important because of the allotment waiting list and so neighbouring plot holders are not caused problems with weed seeds blowing on their plot.

What to grow

Obviously it's entirely up to you but it's a good idea to see what gardeners near you are doing, most allotment holders are ready to share their knowledge and experience. CAA offer discounted seeds from Kings Seeds (a local company) and one of the most enjoyable aspects of having an allotment is choosing seeds for the coming year. On some sites where the ground is very heavy it may be worthwhile propagating your plants at home and putting them in the ground when they are established rather than sowing seeds straight into the ground, again, find out what others are doing.



Sheds/Glasshouses

If there isn't a shed or glasshouse on your allotment plot and you would like one you will need to get written permission from the Council before putting one up, but this isn't usually a problem. Permission is only granted for the erection of a shed if a water butt is also attached to collect water from the roof.

It is a matter of debate whether you should put a padlock on your shed or not – talk to other plotholders to find out what they do.

To get written permission the Council will need to write in either via post or e-mail with details of the structure which you plan to erect including its size and the location on your allotment where you plan to site it. The

maximum size shed or glasshouse is 8ft x 6ft (2.5m x 1.8). Only one shed and glasshouse are allowed on each plot. Similar written permission is also required for the erection of a poly-tunnel on your allotment plot. The maximum size poly-tunnel allowed is 15ft x 8ft (5m x 2.5m).



Please bear in mind that asbestos should not be brought onto allotment sites. It therefore should not be used for the construction of sheds.

All structures and personal belongings brought onto an allotment site are the responsibility of the allotment holder, and are therefore not covered by Colchester Borough Council insurance. You therefore might want to consider insuring your belongings that you bring onto the allotment site in case they get damaged or stolen.

Fences

Allotment plots should not be fenced. This is to ensure that good access is maintained around the site and on allotment plots.

Fruit Trees

Permission to plant a standard fruit tree on your allotment will not be given, but miniature varieties such as step over trees and minarette trees will be considered. No trees with a mature height of 1.8m or over will be considered and only three trees are allowed per allotment plot.



Paths

The small paths around your plot are your responsibility. These paths should be 0.5m to 0.75m wide to ensure that there is good access maintained around the allotment site.

The larger paths and tracks are maintained by the Council. Tracks, where appropriate can be driven along. However, please be aware of ground

conditions before driving along these as you will be liable for any damage caused. Some tracks are cordoned off during wet times.

Whether you divide your plot into smaller beds with paths between or whether you have one large area with no paths is a matter of personal preference. You will find gardeners who champion one or the other but it is up to you!

Compost

It would be very wasteful not to start a compost heap – or three! Almost everything can go onto it (except diseased stuff) and in a year or so you will have a good supply at no cost! 3 or 4 pallets make an ideal bin and can be joined together with wire. Alternatively the previous allotment holder might have left an old compost heap which you can continue using.

Remember, any green waste is your responsibility to recycle or dispose of in a legal manner. Waste should not be dumped anywhere on the allotment site and any bonfires must only be lit according to the Councils Code of Practice for bonfires.

Allotment Water

Water is supplied through troughs on 16 of the 19 allotment sites which we manage. Allotment water is switched off over the winter period to avoid frost damage and is turned back on in the spring once the cold weather has passed. If there are any problems with the water supply such as a leak then please do contact the Council on 01206 282266 as soon as possible.

Please be considerate to other allotment holders when collecting water. Hosepipes must not be connected to water troughs and water must not be siphoned from allotment water tanks onto allotment plots. Water is not an infinite resource – please use it wisely. For water saving ideas please visit

www.colchester.gov.uk/allotments.



Please don't wash tools or produce in water tanks as this can cause problems with tank maintenance and spread plant diseases.

If you would like easier access to water then consider installing water butts on your allotment plot. This will ensure that you have water in early spring and you will have a water supply on your own plot.

Plot Numbers

Don't forget to display your plot number on your allotment plot in a prominent position. This helps to identify your allotment plot if there is a problem such as a shed being blown over in windy weather or site inspections.

Change of Address

Please do not forget to let us know of any change of your contact details. You will need to contact the Allotments Team directly about this as your details are not automatically updated when you contact other Council departments such as Council Tax.



Allotment Rental

Allotment rents are payable in advance on 1 October of each year, this covers the period from 1 October until 30 September or on an annual basis from the date of your agreement if issued after May 2019.

Any allotment tenant with rent outstanding for 40 days or more will be issued a Notice to Quit letter to vacate the plot.

Any plot holder who receives a second Notice to Quit letter for non-payment within a three year period will have their allotment tenancy terminated.

If you are having difficulty in paying your allotment fee please contact the allotments team on 01206 282266 or email allotments@colchester.gov.uk

Vacating an Allotment Plot

If you are no longer able to work your allotment plot and would like to give your plot up, please write into the Council either via e-mail or letter to terminate your allotment tenancy agreement. The sooner that we are aware that you wish to vacate your allotment, the sooner we can re-allocate it to somebody on the allotment waiting list. Don't forget to return any allotment keys so we can refund your £10 deposit!

Rules and Regulations

Remember to read and comply with your allotment tenancy agreement. This has all the terms and conditions which you need to be aware of whilst you have your allotment plot.

It is hard work to have a productive allotment. The first 1-2 years are the hardest, but don't let that put you off as the rewards you will reap through eating fruit and vegetables which you have grown yourself are enormous. The main thing is to enjoy the experience.



Colchester Borough Council

Website: www.colchester.gov.uk/allotments

E-mail: allotments@colchester.gov.uk or Telephone: (01206) 282266

Colchester Borough Council is responsible for renting out plots and for collecting annual rents as well as providing keys. They maintain fencing, gates and water supplies. They cut the grass on wide paths and make improvements whenever funds allow.

Site stewards for each site attend meetings approx. once per year to discuss improvements, problems and solutions.

Site stewards also have regular contact with the Parks and Recreation Officers so if you have any improvements which you would like to see, then pass this onto your steward so it can be discussed and possibly added to the Allotment Action Plan.

Colchester Allotment Association

Website: www.colchester-allotments.org.uk

E-mail: allotmenthelp@gmail.com

Colchester Allotment Association is an independent organisation formed in 2003 by a small group of allotment holders who wanted to regenerate the 19 allotment sites we have here in Colchester. At that time some sites were almost empty but now there are over 1100 plots in use.

If you would like any further information regarding our allotment sites then please take a look at our websites.



Growing Calendar

(S) Sowing in succession

(P) protect against pests with netting, cabbage collars etc



Jan / Feb	Broad Beans	Sow in rows 23cm between plants, rows 60cm apart
	Salad Onions	Can also be sown in August for spring crop
March / April	Summer cabbage (P)	Sow in pots, plant out when 7.5cm tall
	Carrots	Sow in rows. Erect fleece barrier or sow in June to avoid carrot fly
	Leeks	Sow in root trainers or pots. Plant out when pencil thick in 15cm holes
	Lettuce / salad leaves (S)	Sow every 3—4 weeks until Sept / Oct
	Onion sets	15cm between plants & rows. Let tops fall over before digging up, dry before storing
	Peas (S)	Sow 3 staggered rows in shallow trench. Put up supports & netting
	Potatoes early	30cm apart, 15cm deep, in rows 60cm apart. Protect shoots from frost
	Potatoes main	38cm apart, 76cm between rows, dig up by Sept
	Spinach (S)	Sow thinly in rows in succession. Pick often Swiss
	chard	Sow 30cm apart. Hardy, pick over long period
April / May	French beans	Sow in warm soil. Put up cane supports, in rows or wigwams
	Beetroot (S)	Sow in rows in succession until July
	Broccoli (P)	Sow in pots, plant out when 7.5cm tall
	Cauliflower (P)	As broccoli
	Kale (P)	As broccoli
	Parsnip	Sow in ground, thin later. Sow radishes to mark rows
May / June	Runner beans	Sow in warm soil, erect supports, pick regularly, keep well watered
	Beans (borlotti etc)	As runner beans. If drying, leave on plants till foliage brown and crisp
	Winter cabbage (P)	Sow in pots, plant out 40—50cm apart when 7.5cm tall. Protect against pests
	Courgette	Raise in pots, plant out May/June 60cm apart. Pick regularly
	Pumpkin / Squash	Raise in pots, plant out May / June 60—90cm apart
July	Sweetcorn	Sow in block not row. 35cm between plants each way
	Swiss chard	See March
August	Japanese onion sets	Plant 25—30cm apart each way
	Salad onions	Sow for spring crop
Sept / Oct	Garlic	Plant cloves 15cm apart
	Spinach (S)	Sow in rows as in March / April
November	Broad beans	Sow as Jan / Feb
December		HAVE A REST!!!!!!



Join the Colchester Allotment Association

The Colchester Allotment Association works hard to promote and preserve allotments in the town. We support allotment holders and below are some of the benefits we offer to members.

You can contact us at colchester_allotments@yahoo.com or visit our website at www.colchester-allotments.org.uk. Colchester Borough Council's website is www.colchester.gov.uk/allotments.

- ▲ We represent members' views to CBC (the landlord of your site) at regular meetings.
- ▲ We help to protect allotments from any threat of development.
- ▲ We work with CBC for improvements to all 19 Colchester allotment sites.
- ▲ Members get a quarterly newsletter with allotment news and information about events.
- ▲ You have the opportunity to join the CAA committee to influence the future of allotments in Colchester.
- ▲ We liaise with other organisations for the benefit of members.
- ▲ We organise trips and talks from visiting speakers.
- ▲ Members use our 50% seed discount scheme with Kings seeds, this can save the annual membership fee.
- ▲ We promote allotment gardening to the wider public.
- ▲ There is support for individual plot holders and help to resolve disputes when necessary.
- ▲ We help and encourage individual sites to hold open days and other events as well as our annual Pumpkin Day.
- ▲ We negotiate discounts with local companies.
- ▲ We provide this welcome pack for all new plotholders.

MembershipApplicationForm

By becoming a member you will be entitled to loan tools, take part in the annual seed scheme, and benefit from any discounts the Association will negotiate.

Please fill in and return to the membership secretary – Mrs Jane Rumble, Carisbrooke, Harwich Road, Great Bromley, Colchester, Essex, CO7 7UL.

Please enclose a cheque payable to 'Colchester Allotment Association', you will receive your membership card and CAA welcome pack in the post shortly.

I enclose a cheque for the following – please tick

1 Year Membership - £3.50

3 Year Membership - £10

Name	
Address	
Postcode	
Telephone	
E-mail	
Site*	
Plot Number	

Thank you for completing this form and joining the Association -*
please be sure to fill in which site you are on.

Colchester Allotment Association

As well as growing vegetables, fruit and flowers, allotment gardeners organise all sorts of other events.

Some sites run produce stalls at local fetes and events.



Some sites have a communal area and hold events and open days

Entrants and winners at the Annual Pumpkin Day event

