

Welcome to Brentham Allotment Gardens! This is a guide for new tenants to help you make the most of your plot. We hope you find it useful. We have very many knowledgeable gardeners on the site and they are usually more than willing to help out if asked. So our very best piece of advice is to be prepared to ask your neighbours for advice. If they don't know the answer they will usually know somebody who does! If you have questions about the site rules and related topics you can also ask the site Manager - Patrick Williams (plot 107).

Tackling an overgrown plot

If you are very lucky you will take on a plot that has been properly cultivated, well maintained and regularly weeded. It is most likely though that the plot you will take on is far from perfect and has experienced recent neglect. It might be overgrown and covered in weeds. Some of these weeds are perennial and/or pernicious, and it is important to know how best to deal with this initially or you will set yourself up for a continued struggle with these weeds.

Many new plotholders give up in their first year because they have unwittingly committed a grave error by rotovating their overgrown plot. Two of our major perennial weeds at Brentham are couch grass and bind weed, both of which regenerate through their roots. So if you chop up the roots and dig them under, rather than getting rid of the weeds you are multiplying them by the thousands! In the growing season you will find your plot overgrown again within the space of a few weeks.

So before you rush into things have a good look at your plot, know your enemies and consider your options to make life easier for you in the long run. At this stage, however, your main task should be identifying whether or not you have a couch grass or bindweed problem. Couch grass is easily distinguished from other grasses such as common meadow grass by digging up a clump and looking at the roots. Bindweed, depending on the time of year, is easily identified either by its characteristic climbing habit or its brittle spaghetti type roots. We have provided a detailed description of most of the commoner annual and perennial weeds at the end of this handout and some tips as to how they should be tackled.

Soil

The soil at Brentham is mostly clay or silt that has been improved over time. Clay soil is heavy. It has the advantage that it holds water and nutrients well. The downsides are that it is easily compacted, wet and cold in winter, slow to warm up in spring and often baked dry in summer. Silt soil is fertile, light, moisture retentive but again easily compacted. It therefore makes sense to create beds with paths in between them to minimise soil compaction, and to not work the soil or walk on it when it is very wet. It is also beneficial to improve the soil by applying lots of organic matter. This can be in the form of garden compost, well-rotted manure or by growing green manures in autumn that are dug under in spring. Brentham used to have a regular supply of free horse manure that has recently ceased. There are stables in Ealing that give away free manure to those who are willing to collect it themselves.

Paths

If you divide your plot into beds or raised beds with paths in between you can cover these paths with woodchips, which we get delivered for free to the woodchip bay in the car park area. The grass paths surrounding your plot are communal paths and should not be covered in woodchips or other materials. It is your responsibility and that of your adjoining neighbour to keep these paths regularly strimmed and well maintained.

Sheds & Greenhouses

It is allowed to erect sensibly sized sheds, greenhouses and polytunnels on the allotments in areas where they will not negatively impact on your neighbours. However, please speak to the site manager to discuss this prior to erecting anything.

Watertanks

We have running water between March/April to November. We recommend installing a waterbutt on your plot for use over winter if you need water during the colder months of the year. It is strictly prohibited to attach water hoses to the taps or to water your plot by using a pump placed in the tanks. You may siphon water as long as it is supervised and the water use is not excessive. During the growing season it is best to water plants copiously every three days or so, than to water a little every day.

Bonfires

Burning weeds on the allotments is allowed but please apply common sense and be considerate towards your neighbours. Dry plant materials prior to burning, to avoid excessive smoke: try to light fires at times when they will least inconvenience other ploholders or neighbouring residents. The best times for bonfires are early morning or late afternoon at the weekends, and during working hours on weekdays. Please don't light big fires near the A40 or the footpath bordering the Brunswick Road side of the site, especially when the wind direction would mean that the smoke might create a hazard for motorists or upset local residents or passers-by. Only wood and dried plant material should be burnt. It is strictly prohibited to burn plastic, rubbish, shed roof felt or other noxious material.

Rubbish

It is your responsibility to remove any rubbish generated on your site. The Council does not provide a collection service. Dumping rubbish in site communal areas is strictly forbidden.

Flowers, Fruit & Trees

Brentham differs from many other allotments in that the plots are not exclusively reserved for the growing of vegetables. You are allowed to grow flowers, fruits, fruit bushes and even trees. In fact, establishing areas of your plot that contain perennials such as artichokes, strawberries, raspberries, currants or fruit trees are a good way of making management of your plot easier – provided the ground has been properly cleared prior to planting. Once fully established, these plants almost look after themselves, contrary to vegetables that need a lot of feeding, watering and weeding.

If you want to plant fruit trees you should select varieties that have been grafted onto dwarfing rootstocks so they stay manageable. Make sure when planting that they will not encumber any paths once fully grown. Keepers nursery in Kent have a fantastic website with detailed information on all types of rootstocks and their growing requirements, as well as comprehensive information on pollinating partners at www.keepers-nursery.co.uk. It is generally best to plant fruit trees as bare rooted plants during the dormant season, ie. between the end of October and mid-March.

Bees

There is an apiary on site. If you are an experienced beekeeper and would like to keep hives on the allotment apiary please speak to the site manager. If you are a beekeeping novice but are interested in learning the craft we recommend you contact Ealing & District Beekeeping

Association who have a teaching apiary not far from the allotments. You can contact them by email at ealingbees@gmail.com.

Poultry

It is possible to keep hens on the allotments subject to prior agreement by the site manager. Please refer to Ealing councils' allotment rules for guidelines on keeping life-stock. Animal husbandry is a fantastic and rewarding hobby but also a serious commitment and should not be undertaken lightly. You will need to provide your hens with appropriate accommodation and an outer run that is fox, vermin and theft proof. You will also need vermin-proof storage space for their food, feeders and drinkers and other chicken keeping paraphernalia. Hens require daily feeding and watering and need to be let out in the morning and locked up in the evening seven days a week. Brentham allotments have a chicken co-operative where several ploholders have joined forces to share these tasks (plot 12). If you are interested in finding out more or joining their waiting list please contact Ann Salaun (plot 14) or Tessa Kostrzewa (plot 29).

Social events

Brentham allotments are managed by BAGS – the Brentham Allotments Garden Society. BAGS organise a range of social events for plot holders, such as newcomer welcome drinks, potato days, the spring plant sale day and the summer social. Updates on these events are sent to ploholders via email with the regular Newsletter and are also posted on the gates.

Trading Hut

BAGS also run the trading hut, which is open every Sunday from 10 am to 12 noon during the growing season. John Human and Tony Donegan jointly act as our Trading Hut Managers and they and their team are working hard on building up a useful stock. Please let us know if there are any additional items you feel ought to be stocked. We are always looking for new people to help out with manning the hut. This involves one two hour session every eight to ten weeks. If you are interested in getting involved, please let us know.

Non cultivation orders

Ealing councils' allotment rules stipulate that '*You must keep the allotment in cultivation, keep weeds under control and maintain the soil in a healthy and fertile state at all times.*'

If you have just taken over a neglected plot you will not be expected to turn it around over night. However, you will be expected to have made a start within three months of having taken over the plot, and to have returned the land to cultivation within a year. The plots are inspected by BAGS during the growing season. If there is a serious concern about non-cultivation and/or seeding weeds on your plot you will get a letter from BAGS with a deadline for improvements. If this is not acted upon and the plot deteriorates further Ealing council will issue a non-cultivation order. This will give you 21 days to cultivate your plot. Failure to comply with the non-cultivation order will lead to Ealing council terminating your tenancy. If you are unable to look after your allotment for health reasons for an extended period of time please let the site manager know so that this can be taken into consideration. Similarly, if you are struggling to keep on top of your allotment please talk to us to see if downsizing might be an option.

Further Information

Further information and links to Ealing councils' allotment rules can be found on our website, www.brentham-allotments.org.uk.