



## New to Churchfields Allotments?

**Our resident expert, Diane Ewart, offers some tips to new WAHGA members just starting out as to how they might make a success of their plots**

### Which basic tools do you recommend I buy?

A garden spade, fork, hand fork/trowel and one or two watering cans are all you need to start. Secateurs are useful for pruning fruit bushes, and general trimming back. I'd also make, or buy, a compost bin.

### I have an overgrown plot; what should I do first?

Think about, and be realistic about, the amount of time you have each week and tackle the plot in stages. Work on the area closest to the water supply, dig out the weeds, get the soil ready for planting and start growing. Gradually work from front to back and before the season is out the plot will be cleared.

### What can I do with all the weeds I've dug up?

You can either bag them up and take the off-site to the 'dump' or household brown bin, or compost on-site.

### Which are the easiest fruit and vegetables to grow for a novice?

Rhubarb, potatoes and onions/shallots are simple, almost foolproof, options. Onion sets can be planted in the autumn for harvesting next year, it's a bit late for potatoes now but worth preparing a bed and setting aside an area for them. You might be lucky and get a rhubarb crown from a fellow plot holder in the autumn, otherwise they can be purchased. In the meantime, sow other quick-growing and easy options; carrots, salad veg, radish, beetroot, and rocket (more slug- and pest-resistant than lettuce). All beans are easy to grow, my favourites are runner and french beans - you might still be able to buy some plants now. Sow kale now for harvesting through the winter. But, most importantly, grow what you like to eat!

### When should I harvest my produce?

For a lot of the veg, I recommend picking while the produce is still young, so smaller than the average



supermarket produce. This applies to courgettes, runner beans, broad beans, french beans, mange tout, peas. For root veg, again carrots are so easy to grow; just pick them when they're small. Small new potatoes are delicious. Sweet corn is best harvested when just ripe, and the flavour when picked and eaten on the same day is sublime.

Many veg can be left in place and harvested when you need them through the winter, broccoli, potatoes, parsnips, sprouts to name a few, so just pick when you need them.

***“For a lot of vegetables, pick while the produce is still young — smaller than the average supermarket produce***

### Where can I get seeds?

The allotment shop has a wide range of seeds at very competitive prices. They stock the most popular tried and tested varieties that work in an allotment environment. Otherwise all the local garden centres have seeds and, on-line, try Sutton's, Thompson and Morgan, Chiltern to name a few that I've used.

# New to the Allotments?

## Tips for new plot-holders

### Where can I get plug plants?

Garden centres stock veg plug plants - though their supplies may be running down at this stage in the growing season. For mail order plug plants Rocket Gardens ([rocketgardens.co.uk](http://rocketgardens.co.uk)) are tried and tested and their customer service and plants are excellent.

### I've seen a lot of plots with vegetables covered with white mesh, others with netting - what needs to be covered and what can be left uncovered?

**Brassicas** - cover with butterfly proof netting as cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, brussels sprouts, kale are all susceptible to being pecked by pigeons and also to the caterpillars of cabbage white butterflies

**Carrots** - if growing in open ground cover with insect proof mesh to prevent carrot fly. Alternatively sow in a large high sided tub as carrot fly don't fly above 60cm.

**Sweet corn** - having had a crop of sweet corn destroyed by crows, we now net the sweet corn against birds

**Leeks** - leek moth is the main pest, so cover leeks with insect proof mesh

**Soft fruits** - the following need to be netted against birds:

Summer raspberries, strawberries, red currants, black currants, blueberries,

The netting and mesh mentioned is all available from the allotment shop.

If you can't be bothered with netting grow the following:

Parsnips, courgettes, squash, all types of beans, radish, spring onions, onions, shallots, chard, asparagus, potatoes, autumn raspberries, tree fruits, blackberries.

### What can I do during the winter months on the allotment?



Winter is the perfect time to prepare the allotment for the next growing season. You'll still have plenty of produce to harvest, potatoes, parsnips, kale, sprouts, cabbage. In autumn sow green manure.

Mulch the soil with your own compost, composted manure. After the first frost, clear away courgette debris, beans, put away nets, bamboo canes and have a general tidy-up. In February, cut back autumn raspberries, prune fig trees, shape the beds. On a cold day sit indoors go through the packets of seeds you already have, prepare a seed list and work out what you're going to sow and where.

**“Walk round the site to see what others are growing and get inspiration.”**

Finally, do chat to other plot holders and glean information and learn from their experiences. Walk around the site to see what others are growing and get inspiration for setting out your plot.

WAHGA's Website features an excellent month-by-month guide, with lots of effective tips about how to manage your allotment throughout the year.

The allotment facebook group is also a great source of useful information and a great place to ask questions!