

# STAPLEFORD TOWN COUNCIL HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDE TO ALLOTMENTS

Allotment sites and the activity of gardening is relatively risk free as long as people are aware of the hazards and make steps to ensure that themselves, other people and wildlife are not put at risk. The Council undertakes risk assessments on the allotment sites. Please read and consider the following points before allotment gardening.

## 1. Physical exercise

- 1.1. Digging the soil is one of the most physically demanding tasks in gardening, as it involves continued bending and straightening of the back when lifting a spade of soil. It needs to be approached with care, particularly if you are not used to heavy work. Sensible shoes are essential to save you from a forked foot or worse.

## 2. Hazardous rubbish

- 2.1. Ensure that you do not leave broken glass and other hazardous materials on the allotment.

## 3. Tetanus or Lockjaw

- 3.1. This is a serious infection caused by bacterium that lives in the soil and especially manured soil. It enters the body through the tiniest abrasion, scratch, thorn, puncture or cut and a few days or weeks later the illness hits. Please make sure that you have a vaccination that can help protect you against tetanus and be careful about scratches and abrasions.

## 4. Skin irritations

- 4.1. Wear gloves and a long-sleeved shirt when pruning plants that can cause skin irritations for example ivy, euphorbia or rue.

## 5. Garden tools

- 5.1. Garden tools can be a hazard if they are not stored properly or are left lying around the garden when not in use. For example, upturned spades and forks.

## 6. Pesticides and fertilisers - ALWAYS follow the instructions.

- 6.1 You must ensure that you read any labels and have a copy of the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) available in case of accident as this will help anyone treating you.
- 6.2 Ensure that chemicals are kept securely locked in their own cupboard off site, away from children and in clearly marked containers. Do not keep them in lemonade bottles or other food containers or leave them lying around your plot. If you must use chemicals, please keep them to your own plot and do not put them on your neighbour's plot. They may garden organically and will not thank you for it!

- 6.3 When using pesticides or fertilisers ensure to wear suitable clothing.
- 6.4 Please ensure that pesticides or fertilisers are disposed of responsibly. Pesticides should never be included in household rubbish, burnt, placed in skips or poured into any kind of drainage system or watercourse.
- 6.5 Please note that Garden Organic provide advice and publications on methods of pest control that do not require pesticides and gardening methods that reduce pest attack.

## **7. First aid kit**

- 7.1. A first aid kit is a wise addition to the tools kept in the garden shed. A small selection of adhesive plasters, antiseptic ointment, a pair of tweezers for removing thorns and splinters and a gauze or lint pad to use as a compress to stop the bleeding if you are badly cut.

## **8. Power Tools**

- 8.1. Most power tools need specific safety and handling training e.g. power chainsaws, trimmers, lawn mowers with metal blades and rotavators. A large rotavator can be a bit of a strain to control, so take a while to get used to it. Power trimmers, shredders, all have their dangers as well. Always follow the manufactures instructions.

## **9. Legionella**

- 9.1. In very hot weather, especially in green houses, it is possible, although very rare, for Legionella (Legionnaires' Disease) to multiply in warm water to potentially harmful levels. Avoid storing potting media in greenhouses or spraying fine mists

## **10. Ponds and water**

- 10.1. Ponds that are planned and maintained properly pose a tiny risk, far outweighed by the numerous benefits to wildlife and enjoyment to people of all ages. Contact your Wildlife Trust, Froglife or The Pond Conservation Trust about construction and maintenance of wildlife ponds.
- 10.2. People at most risk of drowning in ponds are children under three years of age. Risk from drowning decreases as a child's age increases and so their understanding of the danger. Children should be supervised on allotments at all times and must not go on other peoples plots without their express permission.
- 10.3. Aim to make ponds shallow and seasonal; 30-50cm at the deepest point is sufficient for biodiversity and sloping sides also prevent drowning of mammals that come to drink water. In winter use a float to prevent icing-over, otherwise children may be tempted to walk on ice and pond-life will be starved of oxygen.

## **11. Hazards for wildlife on allotments**

- 11.1. These include: litter, low-level fruit netting, use of pesticides, open drains, slug pellets, mowing, strimming, broken glass and piles of rubbish. Certain wildlife e.g. badgers, slowworms, some birds of prey and reptiles have specific legal protection concerning their management. Contact English Nature for advice about protected species.

## 12. Vermin

- 12.1. Rats carry 70 diseases including Weil's Disease, which can cause human death via contaminated water. Plot holders must be vigilant and report any signs of infestation, which include burrows, tracks, droppings and observing the vermin. Contact the Environmental Health team for advice and to report problems.

## 13. Risk of infection

- 13.1. Humans are at risk of infection from handling animal manure. Always wear gloves when handling any type of manure. Fresh manure should be heaped for 6 months, giving time for e-coli to break down. It is the responsibility of the plot holders for basic hygiene and to check tetanus boosters are up to date.
- 13.2. Stopping for a lunch break helps restore energy after lots of digging but don't forget to wash your hands first. Keep a hand-sterilising gel handy or in the shed.
- 13.3. Always wash your fruit or vegetables thoroughly before eating them.

## 14. Personal safety

- 14.1. Allotment gardeners often spend long periods of time on their own on site: take personal safety seriously and tell another person where you are going and what time you will be back. If you have a mobile telephone take it with you. Always lock the gate behind you upon entering and leaving the site.
- 14.2. Be aware of weather conditions that can affect walking surfaces such as hardcore, grass. Use sunscreen to protect you from over exposure to the sun.

## 15. Illegal Activities

- 15.1. Make sure your actions do not contravene any aspect of your tenancy agreement

This document must be read in conjunction with the Allotment Tenancy Agreement which can be found on the Town Council's website at [www.staplefordtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.staplefordtowncouncil.gov.uk). Further copies are available on request from the Town Clerk.