



### Positioning your greenhouse

If you want to put up a greenhouse you have to get the permission of your landlord or planning officer. You are responsible for ensuring that any structure on your plot does not represent a risk to others. It should be sited on a level base, ideally with enough space to walk around for routine maintenance. If your allotment is mainly southward or eastward facing the greenhouse should be positioned with its ridge running east to west. If your site faces north or west, the greenhouse ridge should run north to south. By choosing the correct orientation for your greenhouse, you'll be able to maximise the sunshine and increase your yields.

### Become a member of The National Allotment Society

Membership of The National Allotment Society comes with a raft of benefits, from discounts on horticultural products through to initial legal advice and horticultural expertise. To become a member visit [www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk) or call **01536 266576**.

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### Good starter crops

To help you get started we have listed ten crops that we recommend as being fairly easy to grow. They require minimum effort and are likely to provide you with a happy harvest over the year.

**Beetroot** – grow the white and yellow ones as well as the traditional red, they all taste the same.

**Broad beans** – grow the delicate flavoured summer cropping varieties; sow the seed in March/April.

**Chard** – grow the ones with attractive coloured leaves; tasty and eye-catching.

**Climbing French beans** – they are more reliable and need less space than runner beans.

**Leeks** – hardy enough to withstand all but the worst winters but they have such a tender texture and flavour.

**Lettuce** – make several sowings of “cut and come again” types to enjoy succulent leaves all summer.

**Onions** – best grown from sets planted during March they will be ready to harvest at the end of summer. They will keep well into the new year.

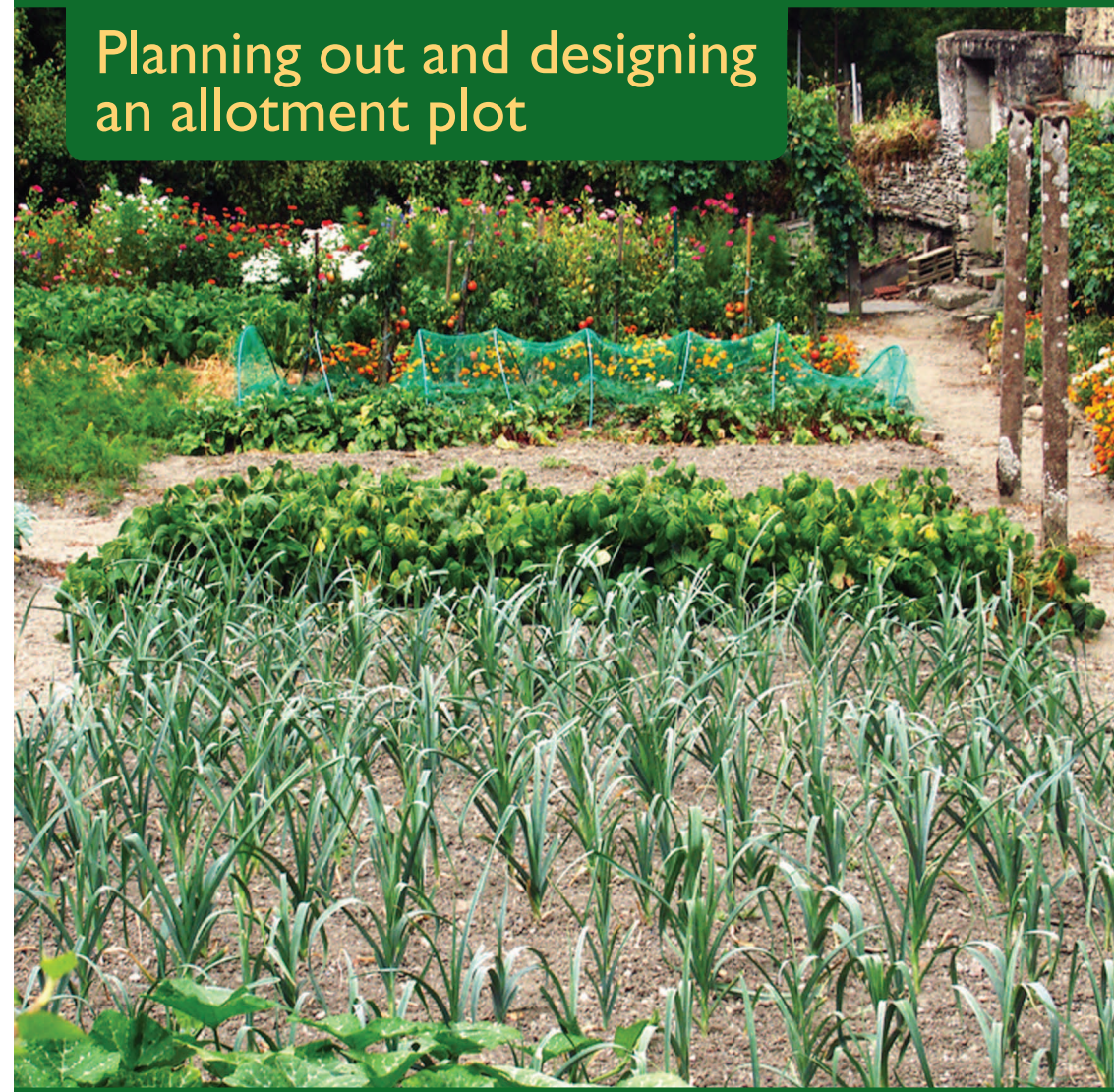
**Oriental vegetables** – sow from August until late September for a delicious harvest of leaves right up until the end of the year.

**Radish (summer and winter types)** – the summer varieties mature very quickly; sow the seeds every four weeks to maintain a regular supply. The winter types are sown towards the end of summer and can remain in the ground for months until they are wanted. For a bit of fun grow the mouli radish and prepared to be surprised. 2ft/60cm long is a little one!

**Spinach (perpetual)** – a reliable cropper that will get you through the winter. It will go on producing fresh leaves well into the Spring.



## Planning out and designing an allotment plot



As a new allotment holder it can be a little overwhelming knowing where to start but like everything in life, the best results come from planning out your ideas. Take time to consider your new plot and what to grow and nature will reward you.

## What is an allotment?

By definition an allotment is to be used for the growing of fruit and vegetables for home consumption (Allotments Act 1922). This doesn't mean that you can't grow flowers, keep hens, rabbits or bees on it, but ultimately this land has been designated under the Act for the growing of fruit and vegetables.

Traditionally allotments were laid out in long rows, but many of today's allotment holders prefer to divide their plots into beds, for ease of weeding and watering. Whichever way you decide on how you want to organise your plot here are a few tips we would recommend you follow...

## Understanding the natural elements

Some allotment sites are exposed to the elements so before you start marking out your new fruit and vegetable beds, it's a good idea to understand how the local weather conditions will affect your plot.

Questions worth asking include:

- How does the sun travel around your plot?
- Do you have any shady areas caused by neighbouring structures, trees, hedges or boundary fences?
- Is your plot exposed to the prevailing wind, which could damage crops and make your soil dry out too quickly?
- Which way is north? This will help you plot the path of the sun across your allotment.
- Are you in a frost pocket and when can the first and last frosts be expected?

To help you get some answers to these questions talk to your fellow plot holders, especially those that have been gardening on the site for some years, their experience will be invaluable. Also take a tour around the site over the months to see what is being grown on the various plots, make some notes to give you a rough guide.

You won't be able to change Mother Nature, but you will be able to plan your allotment accordingly and chose the best spot for your plants.

**Windy sites** – use short plants that grow low down near the soil or chose items like fruit bushes that can be planted to create wind breaks. If you grow more spindly plants like Jerusalem artichokes or broad beans, support the plants with strong stakes and garden string. To help reduce moisture loss, cover your soil with mulch and add plenty of organic matter to the soil before planting.

**Wet sites** – improving the soil structure will help your soil to drain. Mixing in organic matter, trenching the ground or double-digging can all be beneficial and help to get oxygen into the soil; plants will drown if there is no oxygen available to them. Some plants like rhubarb favour wet conditions, but if your plot is always being flooded; it is probably worth considering investing in raised beds. Talk to you landlord or planning officer for guidance before starting on any construction work.

**Dry sites** – again like the windy and wet site, the key to your success lies in good soil preparation. The more organic matter there is in the ground the more moisture can be retained in the soil and also adding a 3.5 inches / 9cm layer of mulch on top of the soil will also help to retain soil moisture.



## Crop rotations

To ensure the sustained health and fertility of your soil, you should plan to grow the various crops on a different site each year. Adopting a four crop rotation system will take care of this. It involves organising the various types of vegetables into family groups. All of the information you require for this will be found in any good seed catalogue, Kings Seeds catalogue is excellent for this purpose. [www.kingsseeds.com](http://www.kingsseeds.com)

**Brassicas** are all the members of the cabbage family e.g. radish, kale, turnip, sprouts, broccoli.

**Legumes** are all members of the pea and bean family which includes soya beans.

**Roots** include all of the onion family: leeks, garlic, shallots, spring onions and all of the carrot family; as well as parsnips, Florence fennel, celery and celeriac.

**Potatoes** also include all of the "neutral" crops such as beetroot, sweet corn, lettuce, spinach, chard, courgettes etc.

Some perennial vegetables do not fall neatly into any of these categories and need to remain undisturbed for several seasons to ensure productivity. For example an asparagus bed can last up to twenty years; while soft fruit bushes like raspberries, gooseberries, red, white and blackcurrants should be considered as long lived plants and allocated to a plot that doesn't form any part of the rotation system. Always plan before you plant, and don't over invest in your allotment if it is a possibility that you are not going to be there in five years time to reap the benefits of your efforts.

See the table below.

	Bed one	Bed two	Bed three	Bed four
Year one	potatoes	brassicas	legumes	allium/roots
Year two	allium/roots	potatoes	brassicas	legumes
Year three	legumes	alliums/roots	potatoes	brassicas
Year four	brassicas	legumes	alliums/roots	potatoes

## Animals

According to the Allotments Act 1950, plot holders can chose to keep hens (not cockerels) and rabbits on their plots. This piece of legislation still stands today but before deciding to bring any livestock onto the site, please ensure you have the written permission of your landlord and check the details of your tenancy agreement. The number of livestock that you intend to keep should be limited to personal use.

Rabbit hutches and hen houses must be humane and take the welfare of the animal into consideration. For guidance please talk to DEFRA, the RSPCA or British Hen Welfare Trust. (It may be made a condition of your tenancy agreement, that if it is felt that any livestock is being neglected or ill-treated, they will be removed and the matter reported to the RSPCA for them to deal with).

Bees can make an excellent addition to any allotment site, they help to pollinate many plants and in turn could provide you with jars of honey. Again please seek permission of your landlord before erecting any hives, also consult with your fellow plot holders to find out if anyone is allergic to bee stings.

We recommend that any soon-to-be bee keepers should attend training days or workshops to prepare themselves for their responsibilities. It is important that any hives are sited where they will cause the minimum interference for the other plot holders and neighbours.

For further information and advice please talk to the British Bee Keepers Association. [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)  
T: 02476 696 679