



South Dublin Allotments Association

General Health & Safety Tips - Factsheet No. 1

Here follows some general points on health and safety when working on your allotment site, for your comfort and well-being.

Personal Safety

Plot holders should be mindful of the fact that some of the Council's allotment sites are located in isolated areas and to be conscious of their own personal safety. It is important to let someone know your whereabouts when visiting your plot. Please ensure that the access gate is always locked after entering or exiting the site. If you have a mobile phone be sure to bring it with you and make sure it is fully charged in case of accidents or emergencies.

Clothing

Wear clothing appropriate to the time of year, weather conditions and the task at hand on your plot.

Hygiene

Wear gloves, especially when handling soil and manure or compost. Rinse and bandage any cuts and grazes. Always wash your hands before eating. Be aware of the possibility of soil containing Tetanus or Weil's Disease, the latter particularly in warm summer conditions around pools of water. Weil's Disease is carried by rats. It would be useful to carry a basic first aid kit for minor injuries.

Tools

There are a wide variety of tools available. Always try to choose the one that feels mostly suitable to you in terms of height/length and weight.

If left lying around your plot, tools can be hazardous and may cause a nuisance to other plot holders. Always prop up or position out of the way when not in use.

Lifting/Digging

Allotment gardening is hard physical work. Lifting awkward or heavy loads requires an understanding of your capabilities/physical limitations, care and practice, particularly if not used to it. Digging involves bending and straightening of the back when lifting a spade of soil. For your back's sake be careful and assess the task to be approached with care and never rush into it.

Warm up with a brisk walk around or on the spot exercises before starting to dig, especially on cold days. Dig small amounts at a time – don't try to dig your whole plot in one go. Dig small spadefuls or forkfuls at a time. Stop to straighten and stretch every so often. Take regular breaks – either a rest or a change of task. Wear gloves to protect against blisters. Wear solid boots with good treads and toe protection.

Machinery

If using power tools such as mowers, strimmers or rotavators, remember to be careful and that you are responsible for the safety of other plotholders and visitors. Always wear appropriate protective clothing, such as eye guards, gloves, ear protection, long trousers and solid boots. Always follow manufacturers' instructions carefully.

Rotavators take getting used to, so go slowly and carefully with them. They tend to be not much use on firm, totally uncultivated soil, often just bouncing off the surface in a dangerous manner. In this situation the soil may have to be broken up a bit by hand first. Very stoney ground can be dangerous too, either jamming the rotavator or throwing up stones which can hurt both the operator and others near by.

Chemicals

If using chemicals such as pesticides or herbicides be aware of your own safety and that of others around you. Wear a mask, gloves and anything else recommended by the product manufacturer. Do not spray on breezy or windy days, to avoid the chemical going onto other people and other people's plots.

Wood preservative, paint, slug pellets, etc. should be only used in such a way that they do not encroach on other allotment sites.

Make sure all chemicals, whether liquid, solid or powder, are properly sealed when not in use and put securely out of the reach of children.

Be careful not to spill any chemicals, including machine oil and petrol, and always take any surplus home with you for safe disposal at an approved hazardous waste facility, e.g. Ballymount Civic Amenity Centre.

Water Containers

Water containers, troughs and barrels should be protected at all times to prevent access by children.

Safe Condition of Plots

Keep your plot in a safe condition, both for your own well-being as well as other plot holders and visitors. This includes such things as ensuring that scrap material for reuse is stored safely so that there are no nails or sharp edges that could cause injuries or that materials cannot blow about in windy conditions. Pathways should be clear of trip hazards such as tools, potholes, slippery surfaces or uncoiled hoses.

Disclaimer

The information presented here is intended as a basic guide only and is not intended by the South Dublin Allotments Association to be fully comprehensive. The guidance given here is not necessarily endorsed by South Dublin County Council. Following this guide does not absolve individual plot holders from taking personal responsibility for their own health and safety, e.g. by consulting further with health and safety professionals or medical practitioners. People with a medical condition are usually advised to consult their physician before undertaking any strenuous exercise.