

Supporting London's Allotments & Community Gardens

Allotment gardening is burgeoning in popularity across London as people aspire to lead a more sustainable and healthy lifestyle. Demand greatly exceeds supply, with hundreds of people on waiting lists in certain areas, while local authorities face ever increasing pressure to develop land. Meanwhile, informal community gardens are springing up across the capital, particularly in the inner boroughs where statutory allotment sites are scarce.

At CPRE London we recognise the importance of allotments as valuable green spaces that should be conserved and protected. We have put together some key information on allotment gardening in the capital below and urge you to get involved with your local allotment association or community garden. Happy digging!

How do I find my local allotment?

There are over 700 allotment sites in Greater London, of which the vast majority have waiting lists. Unsurprisingly, the outer London boroughs tend to have more allotment sites. The best place to search for your local site is on the Greater London Authority's allotments website, where you can search by postcode or borough. Clicking on the borough's name in the search results will take you to their allotments page:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/allotments/>

Some allotments are run independently by local associations. Contact details can usually be found on the relevant local authority website. The National Allotment Society's site also has a useful search function:

<http://www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/find-an-allotment/>

How much does it cost to rent an allotment?

Rental fees in London vary greatly. Some boroughs charge as little as £30 per annum for a standard plot of 250 square metres, while others charge up to £190. Non-residents of the borough can expect to pay significantly more.

Concessions are often available for over 65s and people on a low income. Half-plots of 125 square metres are also common, and cost less.

You could also talk to your local allotment association about the possibility of sharing a plot with someone else, as they may know of people who are struggling to manage their plot on their own.



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How big are allotments?

Allotments are measured in units of 25 square metres, commonly referred to as a 'pole', 'rod' or 'perch'. A standard allotment plot is ten poles, or 250 square metres, but this is a considerable commitment and half or even quarter plots are often available.

The waiting lists for my local allotments are full. What are my options?

If you live in an outer London borough, you could lobby your local authority to provide additional allotment space. Alternatively, you could get involved with a local community garden or city farm.

What are the benefits of allotment gardening?

Allotments provide a wealth of benefits to individuals, communities and entire ecosystems. Below are just some of the reasons why we should support and protect allotments.

Social benefits

Allotment gardening is an excellent way of meeting like-minded local people. Many people enjoy the sociable aspect and the inclusive atmosphere in which people from all walks of life can get together and share skills, knowledge and ideas. Community gardens encourage working together as a team to create something positive and foster a sense of pride in their neighborhood. Some are set up specifically to help integrate traditionally marginalised groups such as the homeless, disabled or ethnic minorities, into their local communities.

Many community gardens are run by, or receive school groups, helping children to learn practical skills and get involved with their community in a fun and engaging way. City farms also host school groups on a regular basis, teaching them about food production and environmental stewardship. These spaces are particularly important to young people who may not have regular access to the countryside.

Ecological benefits

Allotment gardens provide food, shelter and habitat for a range of wildlife, including birds, insects, amphibians and small mammals. They also attract pollinators and encourage biodiversity. Allotments may serve to connect fragmented patches of habitat, for example by bordering other green spaces or corridors such as railway lines, allowing animals to move between their breeding, nesting and foraging sites safely.



Physical and mental health benefits

Tending an allotment provides an escape from the pressures of day to day life and is an excellent form of physical exercise. Being out in the fresh air and connecting with nature is both calming and stress-relieving.

Growing your own food and being able to eat the fruits of your labour is wonderfully rewarding - seeing a packet of seeds blossom into a fresh crop of tomatoes creates a sense of achievement and pride! Allotment gardening also helps us to appreciate our food more and encourages us to pay more attention to what we eat, fostering a healthier lifestyle and a diet rich in fruit and vegetables.

Lobbying for new allotment space

Lobbying for new allotment space should be possible (in theory) under Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act (1908), which requires local authorities to provide sufficient allotment space to meet demand.

In practice, at least six people on the electoral register who feel that this demand is not being met may put together a request for more allotment space in writing for the local authority to consider. The Allotments Regeneration Initiative may also be able to help.

Unfortunately, this is not an option for residents of inner London boroughs. Section 55 of the London Government Act (1963) supersedes the Small Holdings and Allotments Act, stating that the provision of allotments by inner London boroughs is at the discretion of the local authority.

Are allotments and community gardens protected from development by law?

Statutory allotments, which were purchased by local authorities for specific use as allotments, are protected under the Allotments Act 1925. They cannot be sold or used for another purpose without ministerial consent. In the event that consent is granted, alternative allotment space must be provided.

The National Allotment Society provides free legal advice to allotment associations and individuals whose plots are at risk:

<http://www.nsalg.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/>

Non-statutory allotments and community gardens are not protected by law, but local authorities are beginning to recognise their value as open spaces that foster social inclusion and a healthy lifestyle. It may be possible to lobby your local authority to protect your community garden from development. The Allotments Regeneration Initiative and the National Allotment Society may be able to help.

Capital Growth 2012

The Capital Growth 2012 campaign is an initiative launched by London Food Link, the Mayor of London, and the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund to create and support 2,012 new community food growing spaces across London by the end of 2012.

Over 1750 spaces have been registered so far, creating over 45 hectares (42 football pitches) of new growing space across the capital. Many of these spaces are run by schools, housing groups, small charities and residents' associations and receive funding from the initiative.

The Capital Growth website provides advice on how to set up a garden and information on the training, support and funding available. It also offers a search function by postcode or borough, with the results displayed on a map which also indicates whether a space is looking for volunteers.

[Capital Growth 2012](#)

[Search for your local space](#)



Community gardens and city farms

Community gardens are seeing a surge in popularity across London, and are often looking for volunteers. Support is also available should you wish to start your own.

Community gardens tend to be smaller than allotments and are often established temporarily on brownfield sites. They typically include a mixture of separate plots and an open, communal area. The inner London boroughs tend to have the highest concentration of community gardens, with over 150 registered in Hackney alone.

Getting involved in a local community project is an excellent way to get started in allotment gardening and to meet local people. Many community gardens are registered with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, or with the Capital Growth 2012 campaign.

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Several of the larger, more established community gardens are members of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens. Their website contains a wealth of information, including a search function to find gardens and farms in your local area, and a London map and guide which can be downloaded or sent to you by post if you provide an SAE.

[Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens](#)

[Search for a farm or garden in your area](#)

[Download London map and guide](#)

The Federation also launched the Allotments Regeneration Initiative in partnership with the National Allotment Society in 2002, which aims to support the creation and regeneration of new and disused allotment sites in the UK.

[Allotments Regeneration Initiative](#)

[National Allotment Society](#)