

THE OMMLAA ALLOTMENT HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been prepared using plain English and is available on the parish council website where accessible links are used for assisted reading.

Old Marston Mill Lane Allotments Association (OMMLAA), Old Marston Parish Council and Mike Cantillon (Southern Regional Representative of the NSALG) have worked together in producing this new Allotment Gardener's Handbook. It explains the rules of the tenancy agreement and what can and can't be done on our allotment site. It also explains how the allotment site is managed and who to contact if you have any problems.

There are also some tips on allotment gardening. For those of you who are novices, there is some basic advice on getting started, safety and composting. For those of you who are experts - you might not need that part of the handbook!

Although, there are a great deal of really good books and magazines that will guide you with, how to get started, what to do when, explain the different ways of gardening, etc.

We would like to encourage as many people as possible to take up allotment gardening, so please tell your friends about the benefits of growing your own produce: the exercise, the fresh air and the satisfaction of eating fresh fruit and vegetables that you have grown.

OLD MARSTON MILL LANE ALLOTMENTS

There is a long tradition of allotment gardening in Old Marston. Much of the early minutes of the parish council were centred around finding land and the management of the allotments. However, in October 2003, an agreement was made between Old Marston Parish Council and the allotment association to enable Old Marston Mill Lane Allotments Association (OMMLAA) to manage the site on a day-to-day basis. This agreement was for 25 years and a continuation, taking it through to 2053, has been signed. The site is statutory, meaning that as an allotment it is protected in law. The site is 2.74 acres with 34 plots, many sub-divided into half plots.

The allotments are situated on the right-hand side of Mill Lane as you travel towards the ring road, after Bradlands.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR AN ALLOTMENT?

Anyone who lives in the parish of Old Marston can apply for a plot.

HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR A PLOT?

If you would like to apply for a plot, then please contact the allotment site secretary who will advise you if a plot is available and if one is not available then they can add you to the waiting list. Once a plot has become available, then the secretary will arrange for you to view the plot and give you the opportunity to ask any questions. If you decide to take the plot then you will need to complete a tenancy agreement, provide proof of address, and to pay the annual rent.

WAITING LIST POLICY

If all the plots are occupied the Allotment Association Secretary will keep a waiting list for those who are interested in renting a plot. When a plot becomes available it will be offered to the person who has been on the waiting list the longest.

SITE MANAGEMENT

The Old Marston Mill Lane Allotments Association committee co-ordinates the running of the site, renewals, and general enquiries. Any business relating to the allotments should be directed to the allotment association secretary. Any serious complaints or concerns should also be expressed in writing to the allotment association secretary. All maintenance work on the site is handled by the Old Marston Mill Lane Allotments Association committee.

BONFIRES AND RUBBISH DISPOSAL

Bonfires, BBQs are only permitted on the space alongside the tool storage container. Green waste can be made into compost, other dried out organic material can be burnt but all other waste must be removed from the site. The nearest refuse disposal site to the allotments is at Redbridge on the Abingdon Road.

KEYS AND SECURITY

A key to the padlock at the main entrance will be supplied to each tenant. This key is for your own use but remains the property of the allotment association and it must be returned if you give up your allotment. **You must lock the allotment gate every time you enter or leave the site.** If you are worried about any aspect of site security, please contact the association secretary immediately. Occasionally we have experienced theft of belongings from the site (especially from sheds): please report any such incident to the association committee and, more importantly, to the police. For crimes in progress ring **999**. For less urgent matters, ring the local police on **101**.

Old Marston Mill Lane Allotments Association will try to ensure that the

allotment site is as safe as possible, but we rely on tenants keeping us informed of any problems. Neither the allotment association nor the parish council take any responsibility for the loss of tenants' belongings through criminal activity. You are advised to consider your own insurance and to take reasonable precautions to keep your belongings safe.

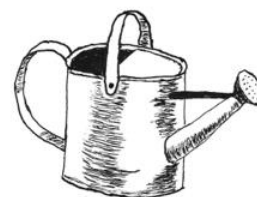
SHEDS, GREENHOUSES AND POLYTUNNELS



If you would like to erect a shed on your plot or any other built structure (e.g., a cold frame, greenhouse or timber compost heap) then please contact the association secretary first and do not begin construction until you have permission in writing. New sheds or greenhouses should not be larger than 8' (2.4m) x 6' (1.8m) and must be positioned so that they do not shade neighbouring plots. Sheds, Greenhouses and polytunnels should occupy no more than one quarter of a plot. All structures must be safe and sound and are erected at your own risk. Asbestos must not be brought on to the allotment site.

WATER

There is a water supply on the site, however, this is metered so the association pays for all water used. Tenants are therefore encouraged to install their own water collection systems. These should be of stout materials, covered and positioned high enough to be out of reach of small children. Stagnant water should be discarded as it poses a health risk and is not beneficial to plants. The use of sprinklers is prohibited and hose pipes must not left unattended.



How to reduce the need to water

- Dig in or mulch with plenty of organic matter; this will help to retain moisture in the soil.
- Apply mulches when the soil is warm and moist, this will reduce water loss due to evaporation and also suppress weeds.
- Weeds compete for moisture and nutrients in the soil so weed regularly or cover soil with a weed suppressing geo-textile. The weeds, roots and all can be composted if processed correctly by drowning in water or put in a black plastic bag in the sun until they decompose. Weed seeds will only be destroyed in the hot compost process.
- Grow crops that suit your local conditions.

A greenhouse or poly-tunnel can increase the need for water significantly so water harvesting from these structures is important.

RIGHT OF ENTRY

The clerk of the parish council has the right to enter the allotment site. However, this will only be after the clerk has notified the allotment association secretary and arranged a date and time.

LIMITS ON THE USE OF YOUR PLOT

Your allotment must only be used for growing fruit, flowers and vegetables – chickens, rabbits and bees are also allowed. (See page 9 for further information) New tenants must ensure that 1/3 of the plot is cultivated within 3 months of joining the site and 2/3 within 12 months of taking over the plot. Tenants whose rental extends beyond the initial year must ensure that they are gardening the majority of the plot throughout the growing season and adequately maintaining the site during the fallow period. No more than 25% of the plot should be used for sheds, greenhouses or paths.

CONDUCT

The allotments are for all to enjoy. The allotment association will not tolerate bullying, harassment, or discrimination of any kind on the site. In the unlikely and unfortunate event of any disagreements or disputes between tenants, the matter must be referred to the allotment association committee whose decision shall be final.

MAINTENANCE OF PATHS

The allotment association is responsible for the maintenance of the main tracks on the site. Tenants must keep the verge directly in front of their plots clear to enable the cutting of the main pathways. Tenants are asked not to block any pathways. Paths between plots are the responsibility of tenants and tenants should maintain the half of the path adjacent to their plot.

MAINTENANCE OF FENCES

Old Marston Parish Council is responsible for the fencing hedgerow and gates surrounding the allotment site. Please do not put rubbish up against fences as this will cause them to lean and rot.

Tenants are responsible for fencing surrounding their own plots.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

If you see a broken padlock, damaged fence, or any other problem on the site then please report it to the site secretary on telephone 07789991051 as soon as possible so that repairs can be carried out promptly.

HOW BIG ARE THE ALLOTMENT PLOTS?

Allotment plots vary in size and shape.

WHAT CAN YOU GROW?

You can grow any vegetables, fruit and flowers. If you want to plant a fruit tree you must have written permission from the allotment association committee and can only do so after an initial one-year lease. Please contact the site secretary with details of the tree you want to plant. Large trees are not permitted because they will cast shade over a wide area and take nutrients and water from neighbouring plots.



TOOLS

There are a variety of types of tools, forks, spades, Chillington hoes, etc. It is a case of what you work best with.

To start, only a few basic tools are needed, these include:

- **Spade** – for digging and turning the soil,
- **Fork** – for breaking down the soil and removing weeds,
- **Hoe** – to cut off emerging weed seedlings,
- **Rake** – for levelling the soil and creating a fine tilth for seed sowing,
- **Hand Fork and trowel** – for planting.

It has been said to treat the hoe as your best friend, always keep it handy as it will stop weeds taking over.

Your tool kit can be added such as:

- **Gloves** – for protecting the hands,
- **String** – for tying up peas, beans etc.
- **Secateurs** – for pruning,
- **Shears and knife** – for keeping grass paths down and taking cuttings,
- **Canes or sticks** – for peas, climbing beans, sweet peas, etc.
- **Bucket** – for carrying crops or putting weeds in,
- **Wheelbarrow** – for moving things around the plot.



BRINGING COMPOST/MANURE ONTO THE SITE

Gardeners may bring green waste such as grass and hedge cuttings onto their plot for making into compost for their own use. Manure may also be brought onto the site in appropriate quantities provided it is stored and

used appropriately. Please remember that humans are at risk of infection from handling animal manure (e-coli bacteria is especially prevalent in fresh manure) and always wear gloves when handling any type of manure. If you are taking a delivery of manure, then please ensure that you are on site to oversee the delivery and ensure that vehicles do not drive onto neighbouring plots, causing damage to the plot and soil compaction. **Storage of compost or manure must be within the perimeter of your plot and not the public areas or paths.**

KEEPING OF LIVESTOCK (INCLUDING BEES)



The allotment association permits tenants to keep chickens and rabbits, as long as they follow the appropriate RSPCA guidelines regarding the size of a coupe and the outside area required for a given number of chickens and are on their own allotment plot. The keeping of bees on the allotments is also allowed but please be mindful of flightpaths and fellow plot holders. Beekeepers should be members of the BBKA and should also have insurance. No other livestock is permitted on the site.

DOGS

Tenants may bring their dogs onto the allotment site but must keep them on a lead and strictly on their own plot. Ensure that you clear up after your dog, having consideration for other tenants. As a tenant, if you have any problems with dog fouling then please report this to the site secretary.

VERMIN

Vermin infestation is a very serious threat to health because of the numerous diseases which rats carry, and the allotment association is very keen to keep the site vermin free. Please be careful to avoid any practices which might encourage vermin.

Open composters are fine for grass cuttings and weeds but not for kitchen waste. Overgrown plots and piles of rubbish will also attract rats, so it is important to keep your plot tidy. If you see a rat or any sign of infestation, including burrows, tracks or droppings then please inform the site secretary immediately so that a pest control strategy can be considered. Do not use poisons yourself as this will affect wildlife within the gardens.



USE OF CHEMICALS

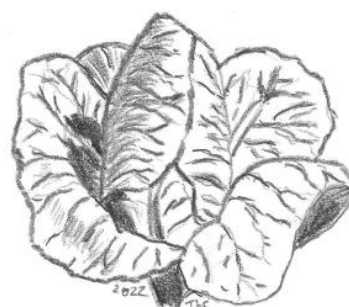
No chemicals, pesticides or herbicides may be stored anywhere onsite at the allotments

The allotment association and Old Marston Parish Council are committed

to minimising the use of harmful pesticides and herbicides on its' land. Whilst you are free to bring and use sprays and fertilisers on your own plot, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, by doing so, you must take care that you do not affect any adjoining plots, hedges or trees, etc. You should only use chemicals where necessary and then within your own plot, in a manner that will cause the least harm to the environment, members of the public, game birds and other wildlife (other than vermin or pests), and you must comply with the law about use of pesticides and chemicals. You should be aware that game birds are protected by law. You are no longer permitted to store any chemicals, pesticides or herbicides on site.

SALE OF PRODUCE

Although the sale of surplus produce from an allotment is prohibited in law, it is recognised that at times surplus produce can be exchanged. This is not to be done on a commercial basis as the allotment is to be used to cultivate produce for your own personal consumption. Running a business or trading from an allotment garden is also prohibited.



VEHICLES ON SITE

You may drive your vehicle on to the site, but you must lock the gate behind you each time and stick to the tracks. The parish council takes no responsibility for any damage caused to your vehicle on the site. Please exercise care and drive slowly, bearing in mind that there may be children on site. Please avoid using vacant plots as a turning circle as this compacts the soil and makes the ground extremely difficult to work. Whether you park your vehicle on site or outside the gates you are advised to keep your vehicle locked at all times.

CONDITIONS OF TENANCY AGREEMENT

This part of the handbook explains some of the most important aspects of your tenancy agreement. Please read this carefully.

ALLOTMENT AGREEMENT

The annual tenancy agreement is between Old Marston Mill Lane Allotment Association and you, the tenant. When you sign the agreement, you are agreeing to pay the rent, to take on the plot, to look after it and to abide by the tenancy agreement and the conditions and rules in this handbook. The overall management of the plot stays with Old Marston Mill Lane Allotment Association throughout the period of the tenancy.

CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

If your personal circumstances change so that they affect your ability to manage the plot, such as change of address or leaving beyond one mile of the parish boundary, then please inform the allotment association secretary.

YOUR RENT

Rent is payable at the Annual General Meeting each year. By paying the rent you are agreeing that you accept the tenancy terms and conditions which were issued with the annual invoice.

The rent is reviewed by the allotment association committee on an annual basis and presented for approval at the Annual General Meeting of the association. If there is an increase in the annual rent, then it will apply from the following year.



HOW TO PAY YOUR RENT

An invoice will be sent to you, and this can be paid via bank transfer, by cheque through the post to the association treasurer, or by cash in person. Please do not send cash through the post for security reasons.

SUBLETTING/SHARING YOUR PLOT

The plot can only be let to one household and the tenancy agreement will be made in the name of one person in that household. You are not permitted to sublet or share the plot.

GIVING UP YOUR PLOT

If you decide you no longer want your plot, then you need to inform the association secretary in writing. You will be asked to give written notification of termination which will end your agreement on the date we agree (even if this is a few months away). We will make every effort to lease your plot to another tenant as soon as possible, so that it does not become overgrown.

CARING FOR YOUR ALLOTMENT PLOT

The most important responsibility as a tenant is to look after and maintain your plot. This means you must keep your plot cultivated and free from weeds (as per your tenancy agreement) and you must keep the plot safe and tidy by removing rubbish.

The plot must be kept free of hazards e.g., broken glass and scrap metal. If you are not cultivating all of your plot, then you can cover part of it with a polythene membrane or mulch in order to keep the weeds down. It is

really important to keep your plot tidy so that it does not interfere with the successful gardening of other tenants. **Please note that the failure to control weeds, which then affects a neighbouring plot, may result in the termination of the tenancy agreement.**

If your personal circumstances mean you cannot cultivate your plot (e.g., you are unwell, go away temporarily, etc.) then please tell the association secretary, so this can be taken into account when inspections are carried out. Please remember that as an allotment tenant, you have a duty of care to make sure that your plot does not present a health and safety hazard to any people accessing the allotment site such as other tenants, visitors, contractors or even unauthorised intruders. We have a number of tenants who like to bring their children with them to enjoy the allotment site and we need to make sure the site is safe for all users including curious children.



SITE INSPECTIONS AND NOTICE TO QUIT

The site is regularly inspected and a report with photographs is presented to the committee. If your plot is not cultivated or is not tidy and free from weeds, then you will receive a warning letter. You will be given 28 days in which to clear the plot of any weeds and to remove any rubbish. If after this time you have not cleared the plot then the committee will take action to carry out the work in order to prevent a nuisance being caused to neighbouring plots. The committee will invoice you, “the tenant”, for this work. If you fail to pay or keep your plot tidy and free from weeds or if you break the terms of the tenancy agreement in some other way then you will be given notice to quit.

If a tenant is served with notice to quit, then the allotment association can recover the allotment plot after the notice period has been served. Your plot deposit will be retained, and the allotment association will be unable to refund any rent to the tenant. The allotment association does not wish to serve a notice to quit on any tenant and will always try to negotiate in order to resolve any problems before taking this drastic step. However, it is unfair on other tenants who do adhere to the terms of their tenancy agreement to allow other tenants to consistently allow their plot to become overgrown, to have them tidied up and then neglect them again.

CLEARANCE OF PLOTS

It is the tenant’s responsibility to clear the plot and leave it ready for the next tenant when you give up your tenancy. If you leave your plot in an untidy state so that it is not fit to be re-let to another tenant, then the

allotment association will invoice the outgoing tenant for any costs incurred. This includes removal of rubbish and dismantling of unsafe structures.



COMPLAINTS

If you are unhappy about any aspect of the way the site is being managed or if you have a complaint about the way you have been treated, then you should put your complaint in writing and address it to the allotment association secretary. All complaints will be dealt with at the next allotment association committee meeting, and you will be kept informed about the way your complaint is being handled.

PERSONAL SAFETY AT THE ALLOTMENTS

We are always working to make sure that the allotment site is as safe and secure as possible an environment for tenants. However, it is not possible to make an allotment site a “risk free zone” so please note the following safety advice:

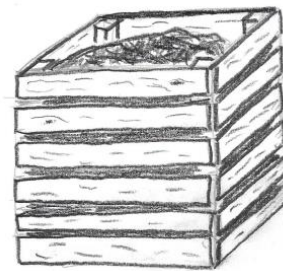
- Ensure that you keep your tetanus injections up to date
- Observe basic hygiene rules when handling manure, soil and chemicals.
- Many gardeners often spend long periods of time on their own on site: please make sure that you tell someone where you are going and how long you expect to be there.
- Report any hazards on the site (e.g., broken glass) to the association secretary as soon as possible.
- Always store sharp tools securely
- Always supervise your children
- Report any crime or suspicious behaviour to the police on 101 for non-emergencies and 999 for crimes in progress. Please also keep the allotment association informed.

RECYCLING

Many allotment gardeners make use of recycled materials for gardening purposes, e.g., railway sleepers, oil drums etc. The allotment association encourages tenants to be inventive and to re-use old materials but reminds tenants that all structures must be safe and secure. Please do not bring anything on to the site unless you have a specific use for it and the project will be completed within 6 months. Piles of recycled materials will encourage rats and rabbits who will quite happily live above ground provided there is sufficient shelter.

COMPOSTING

Composting is a cheap and easy way of providing your plot with an environmentally friendly garden conditioner. Rich in plant nutrients, compost is a crumbly, brown, soil-like material, which forms from the decomposition of organic matter. The addition of compost to your soil will improve its structure and increase the level of biological activity, both of which are vital for successful plant growth.



WHAT CAN BE COMPOSTED?

- Fruit and vegetable peelings
- Grass cuttings, autumn leaves and annual weeds
- Tea bags/leaves and coffee grounds
- Soft prunings and clippings, finely cut hedge clippings.
- Hair and Pet fur, pure wool jumpers
- Small quantities of shredded paper and torn up cardboard.

WHAT TO AVOID

- Fat or bones
- Coal
- Ash
- Products soiled with oil.
- Large amounts of paper
- Metal, glass or plastic
- Nappies
- Meat
- Cooked vegetables
- Bread
- Cat/dog litter
- Sauce covered foods.
- Perennial weeds
- Woody material

TIPS FOR NEW PLOT HOLDERS

Plan your plot: a well-planned plot is more likely to be successful. Good gardens do not just happen.

Decide what you want to grow: grow what you enjoy eating, what your children enjoy eating. Getting children involved at a young age is a great way of promoting healthy eating. Find out what your crops require with regards to soil type, sunlight or whether they require a greenhouse.

Do not be afraid to ask. As a rule, gardeners are friendly and helpful, so ask the person who seems to have the best plot or the most successful one. It is worth remembering that the two plots are not necessarily the same.

Do not try to do too much at once. Do a bit at a time. A little done well will likely be more successful than a lot done hurriedly. Patience is definitely a virtue in the garden.

Be prepared to accept a failure. It happens to EVERYONE!

Enjoy your plot. If you enjoy it, you will look after it. If you look after it then you will succeed.

Good luck and good gardening!

Useful contacts:

Oxford & District Federation of Allotment Associations (ODFAA) –
promote the existence of, the need for, and the benefits to be gained from allotment gardens in Oxford www.odfaa.com

National Allotments Society –
the leading national organisation upholding the interests and rights of the allotment community across the UK. www.nsalg.org.uk

Garden Organic –
Promotes everything organic, using natural methods to promote healthy, productive, sustainable gardens. www.gardenorganic.org.uk

