

# OLD CHESTERTON ALLOTMENT SOCIETY USEFUL GUIDES

Information to help you get the most  
out of your plot



OLD CHESTERTON ALLOTMENT SOCIETY LTD.

PRODUCED BY THE OCAS COMMITTEE



# COMPOSTING

Composting is one of the most environmentally friendly ways of dealing with your allotment waste. It also produces an excellent soil improver. Unfortunately, unmanaged compost can harbour rodents and make weeds grow, so it's a good time to get on top of your compost.

This guide will help you set up and manage a productive composting system. Read on useful advice and guidance on achieving perfect compost!



## Where to compost

Choose a position that ideally has shade or partial shade. But if there is no shade on your plot, this doesn't mean that a compost bin or container won't work. Site your compost heap on your plot and a minimum 30cm inside your plot boundary and 1m from the external boundary fence of the site.



## What type of compost container

Compost bins are effective containers as they keep the rain out and allow air in. They can also be turned easily. Many allotment holders have compost containers made out of wood and commonly pallets are used as are sheets of wiggly tin. Site your compost container on soil so that it attracts worms and other organisms that will speed up the breakdown of your compost. But it is important that your compost container is structured rather than just a pile that gets added to every year.



## Managing your compost

Piling weeds, grass, plants etc onto a heap is not composting. Compost needs to be managed. Ideally compost should be turned regularly - so the newer material is buried under older material. This lets air into the compost and speeds up the composting process.

## What can be composted?

It is important to have a mix of carbon (browns) and nitrogen (greens) in your compost heap. The green material provides nutrients and moisture whilst the browns decompose more slowly and provide the energy source for the microbes that carry out the composting process. The brown material also absorbs excess moisture and facilitates air-flow within the heap. Cut up all compostable material as small as possible as this speeds up the composting process.



### GREENS

**Nitrogen**-rich material:

- Dry plant stems
- Annual weeds
- Unused fruit and veg and peelings
- Nettle leaves and comfrey
- Grass – in moderation
- Raw fruit and vegetables
- Tea leaves and teabags (unless they are plastic)
- Pea and bean-tops
- Manure
- Bedding plants and flowers



### BROWNS

**Carbon**-rich material:

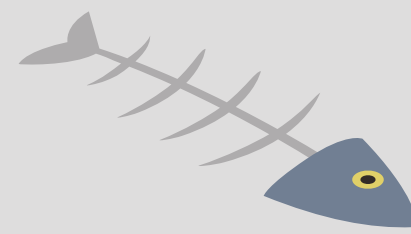
- Prunings
- Small amounts of paper and card (unless it's glossy)
- Dead leaves
- Hedge trimmings (ideally shredded)
- Leaves
- Straw
- Plant stems

**These are by no means exhaustive lists so do check if you are unsure about anything.**



**What not to compost:**

- Perennial **weeds** - including bindweed
- **Diseased plants**
- **Cooked food** and **bread**
- **Meat, fish** and **dairy**
- **Plastics, metal, glass** and glossy **magazines**
- **Citrus** (slow to rot and very acidic, which reduces worm activity)



Finally, the best way to deal with weeds is to keep them under control by hoeing regularly. **Little and often is the best way!**



## OLD CHESTERTON ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

(Old Chesterton Allotment Society Limited. Mutuals Reg. No. 9773R)  
Registered Office: 20A Pakenham Close, Cambridge CB4 1PW



# WATERING

Please may we remind all that only watering cans should be used to collect water from the butts. This is to reduce spillage and waste. Filling buckets and wheelbarrows with water leads to spillage and makes it hard to follow other sensible advice on watering, such as watering slowly and in a targeted manner. It is perfectly acceptable to fill multiple watering cans and wheel them in your wheelbarrow. Try to keep the spout tilting up so that you are not watering the path, and recover any water that spills into your barrow into a can to use it properly on your site. Our resident horticultural experts have produced the following eight tips for watering effectively, both to conserve water and to save you a lot of unnecessary work (both watering and weeding).

## REMEMBER



### **Maintain good soil moisture levels**

Most plants depend on even moisture. However, slight drying out before watering promotes root growth of the plants.



### **Water less often, but thoroughly**

In the flowerbed, one to two watering sessions per week are usually sufficient: better to water less often but with plenty of water rather than a little water often. In the vegetable garden more watering may be required as most vegetables are mainly water. Two or three thorough watering sessions a week for vegetables will probably suffice. Keep an eye on your benchmark plants to see if further watering might be needed.

Big, leafy plants such as squashes and cucumbers lose moisture quickly, and are often the first on the plot to wilt. Keep a beady eye on these plants as they will be the first indicators that you haven't watered enough.



### **Water late in the evening or early in the morning**

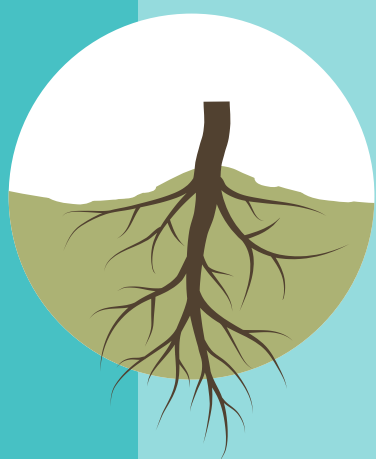
When you water cooled soil in the evening or at night, less water evaporates than it would on hot soil during the day. And the plants can sufficiently supply themselves with water before the next day's heat. Some plants, such as sweetcorn, only open their leaf pores at night to take in carbon dioxide and make starch. For these plants watering in the evening makes particularly good sense.

### **Keep leaves dry to avoid diseases**



Wet leaves become diseased leaves. Leaves that are made wet in the sun develop slight burn marks (magnifying-glass effect of the water droplets). Kept wet overnight, leaf-mould diseases may result. Wet leaves on tomato, pepper and potato plants encourage late blight.

### **Ensure the water reaches the roots**



Apply gradually to allow water to fully penetrate the soil without run-off, Water needs a moment to seep into the soil. Before precious water in the bed flows away unused, it's better to water repeatedly in parts. Apply enough water at each watering for it to sink into the soil and encourage the plant roots to grow downwards to seek water between watering sessions. Too-low water quantities often only cover the upper soil. Water evenly around the plant for a balanced well-developed root system. Always watering at only one root point leads to one-sided root growth and thereby to poorer nutrient absorption from the soil.

## **WATER CONTENT**

- The water content of vegetables is as follows
  - Cucumbers and lettuce: 96 percent
  - Courgettes, radish and celery: 95 percent
    - Tomatoes: 94 percent
    - Green cabbage: 93 percent
  - Cauliflower, aubergine, red cabbage, peppers and spinach: 92 percent
    - Broccoli: 91 percent
    - Carrots: 87 percent
  - Green peas and white potatoes: 79 percent
- Do remember that very young plants and those recently transplanted may require small amounts of watering daily until they become established. Plants in containers may also require more frequent watering than those in the open plot.



### **Make your watering as efficient as possible saving time and water itself.**

Consider using water-saving irrigation methods e.g. drip irrigation. If you have any spare large plastic pots you can bury them upright next to your plant and fill with water. The pot will help focus where the water is going, slowly trickling down through the bottom. This keeps the water in and around the plant, so the roots can gently feed. You can also use large plastic bottles cut in half. Bury the top half head down next to the plant. Mulching can also reduce evaporative loss and suppress weed growth. Digging in organic matter in the winter to improve your soil will also help next season with root growth and water retention. For the tech-minded and those with plenty of money, watering appropriately can be simplified with an automatic irrigation system with moisture sensor – in the bed.



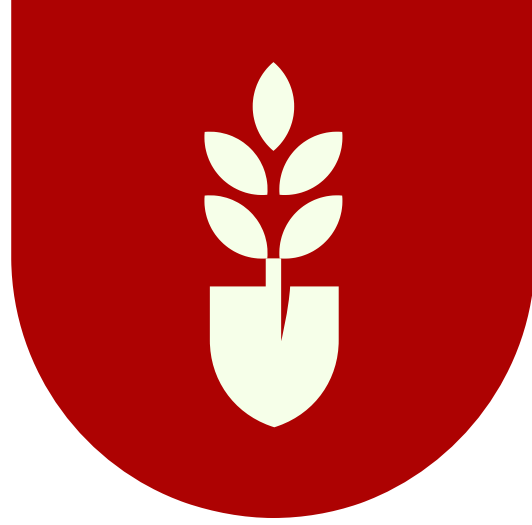
### **Avoid waterlogging**

Waterlogging displaces the breathing air of the roots out of the soil – the root cells drown without oxygen.



### **Get your timing right**

One site gave the following advice about the timing of watering. Timing may require a little research, but individual crops have particular watering needs. There are times when it is not advisable to water heavily, for example young pea and bean plants as this can encourage too much leaf growth. However, later in the growing season, these same plants should be watered copiously when flowers have formed. The same is true of potatoes. Leeks require very little water, brussels sprouts the same, whilst cabbage, courgettes, celery, lettuce and spinach should all be watered frequently. Watering tomatoes brings its own special concerns but perhaps we can ask and communicate further advice on that later in the growing season.



# BONFIRES

**\*\* BONFIRES ARE ONLY PERMITTED BETWEEN OCTOBER AND MARCH \*\***



Bonfires must only be lit **after dark**. Darkness is about 70 - 100 minutes after sunset.



We advise that you bring a **torch** or use your mobile phone light to get the fire going.



Bonfires must be as **far away** from the site perimeter, and your neighbours plots, as possible.



If you are building your pile but not lighting it immediately, make sure you check for **hedgehogs** before lighting.



Please ensure that you go about building and lighting your fire in a **safe** way.



Make sure what you are burning is **dry** so that smoke levels are reduced.



Make sure your fire is **completely extinguished** before you leave the site.



**Thank you for observing these guidelines which will make for a more enjoyable bonfire experience for all.**

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