

Biodiversity and my plot – a guidance note for Individual ploholders

Biodiversity is encouraged on Haringey allotments sites. We already have a wonderfully biodiverse set of sites in Haringey. We aim to maintain and enhance these.

What is biodiversity and why does it matter?

Biodiversity is a measure of the variety of species, habitats and ecosystems on the planet. On our allotment sites it's the variety of trees and plants, animals and insects, and microorganisms in the air, soil and water. Biodiversity matters because it's essential for human life and a flourishing countryside and city landscape. It underpins the food we eat and the air we breathe. We depend on biodiversity for protection from pollution, flooding and climate breakdown. As custodians of allotments, we have a golden opportunity to contribute to local biodiversity through how we choose to maintain our sites and plots.

What can I do to enhance biodiversity while making sure my plot is 75% productive?

It's our duty to make sure we're using 75% of the space on our plots to actively grow fruit, veg, herbs and flowers. In this 75% we can include composting areas and necessary paths (see tenants' responsibilities in your agreement/handbook). In this 75% we can maximise biodiversity in any way which **also** enhances the productivity of our plots for example:

- Composting area/wormery for homemade, natural composts and mulches
- Homemade natural fertilisers (eg 'teas' made from comfrey, nettle, banana peel etc)
- Companion planting (eg sacrificial like marigolds/nasturtium, or signals of disease like roses, or feed plants like borage)
- Flowering plants loved by pollinators eg fruit trees, flowering herbs etc
- Vertical growing to maximise planting (eg of climbing plants like squashes, tomatoes, cucumbers etc, or via vertically structured planters for other crops)
- Varied species of plant (eg heritage, organic, unusual etc)
- Crop rotation to improve soil and reduce pests/diseases naturally
- Experimenting with new approaches (eg no-dig, lunar, permaculture etc)

What can I do to enhance biodiversity in the other 25% of my plot?

In the other 25% of our plot we might have a shed or structure (see tenants' responsibilities in your agreement/handbook). There is potential here for a living roof, or water harvesting via a water butt.

We can give consideration to when to prune borders, hedges and trees so as not to disturb nesting creatures, and decide when to leave expired plants standing to provide overwinter habitats, insects/berries for birds, and soil enrichment as things die down.

Beyond this, nature-friendly projects in our 25% area might include:

- Small pond (check with your site insurance)
- Stick pile/bug hotel
- Controlled area of wild flowers
- Bat box, bird box, hedgehog den etc

A note on pest control

If we think of pests as wildlife, and weeds as wild plants, we may begin to think differently about the way we garden. We can choose to minimise measures which cause harm.

Haringey Council and the Haringey Allotment Forum is already committed to minimising the use of pesticides including weedkillers, metaldehyde based slug pellets, insecticides, fungicide sprays and animal repellents and actively encourage good environmental and sustainable practices including the use of organic alternatives in preference to fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides.

Haringey allotment guidelines state: pesticides and other chemicals may only be used on the allotment site that are of the same formulation and concentration as those that can be purchased for use by amateur gardeners. These are the gardening products that can be purchased from the Trading Shed, garden centres, DIY stores or supermarkets. Do not buy pesticides from the internet or when abroad until you have checked the HSE website that they are legal to use in the UK by amateur gardeners. Professional products approved for use in commercial situations e.g. farms should never be used on the allotment site. You could face prosecution for illegal use and storage of unauthorised or professional products.

A note on sustainability

There are many ways we can garden more sustainably that have not already been mentioned above. A few more ideas:

- Seed collection and seed sharing
- Compostable seed trays and pots instead of plastic
- Re-using matting/netting/plastic pots etc as far as possible
- Re-deploying packaging like fruit punnets, egg boxes etc, to propagate seeds, rather than buying new plastic pots/modules.

Deborah Cawkwell and Kate Pemberton

Version 2 : 29 July 2025