

# Allotments Newsletter

Summer 2016

Welcome to the latest allotment newsletter, keeping you up-to-date with all the latest news, and handy tips.

## Be Water Wise

The chalk streams in England are estimated to account for 85% of the world's chalk stream habitats and, of these, a majority are in Hertfordshire.

However, Hertfordshire is located in the driest region in the country, and Hertfordshire has one of the highest water usage rates in the country - 9% higher than the England and Wales average. Our high levels of water use have led to many of these water bodies experiencing low flows or running completely dry.

There are some simple ways in which we can keep our gardens and allotments healthy while using water sensibly.

- A really good soaking every few days will help plants to develop a deep healthy root system. Light watering may encourage surface roots, leaving plants more susceptible to drought.
- Try to water in the cool of the evening or the very early morning so that less water is lost immediately to evaporation.
- Most garden watering should be aimed specifically at the stem bases beneath the foliage canopy, leaving the surrounding soil dry. This helps to limit weed problems and ensures all the water goes where it is needed.
- Leafy crops such as lettuce and spinach should never be short of water. Onions require little or no watering.



**Please remember**, if you have a shed or greenhouse you are required (under the terms of the Structures Agreement) to make provision for the collection of rainwater from the roof.

The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership has been able to negotiate discounted compost bins for Hertfordshire residents. The mini-Rainsaver (100l litre) is £24.98 and the Rainsaver (190 litre) is £29.98. To order a water butt please visit [www.herts.getcomposting.com](http://www.herts.getcomposting.com) or telephone 0844 571 4444.

# Rent Concessions

In February 2016 the Council agreed a new policy which is designed to give consistency in the way that all of its charges are calculated and concessions are applied.

The policy shall apply to **all** fees and concessions that the Council has the discretion to set, for example pavilion and hall hire, bulky waste services, trade waste services, car parks and allotments.

From 1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017 concessions of 35% are available those in receipt of means tested benefits:

- Income Support
- Income Based - Job Seekers Allowance
- Income Related - Employment Support Allowance
- Pension Credit - Guaranteed Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit

From 1 April 2017 concessions will be 25%.

Therefore some plot holders who currently receive a 50% concession, due to age, disability or unemployment will not be entitled to a concession when the annual invoice is next issued in December 2016. Those who are will only be entitled to a 35% concession.

So what does this mean for allotment plot holders? As an example, based on current allotment charges for a 10 rod (250m<sup>2</sup>) plot:

December 2015	December 2015	December 2016	December 2017
Standard	Concession (50%)	Concession (35%)	Concessions (25%)
£85	£42.50	£55.25	£63.75

We understand that these changes may cause some plot holders to review the number or size of plots that they work in future. If this is the case, it would be helpful if you could notify your Site Agent by 30 September.

If you believe that you will be entitled to a concession (based on the list above) in 2017 please ensure that you provide evidence of your entitlement to Barrie Secomb, between 7-20 November 2016.



**Please remember** to notify SGAA of any changes to you details - address, telephone, e-mail etc. If we don't have current details you may miss out on important updates. Thank you.



# Top tips for composting

Composting is an inexpensive, natural process that transforms your kitchen and garden waste into a valuable and nutrient rich food for your garden. It's easy to make and use. It helps to reduce the amount of waste sent to land-fill, and gives you a nutrient-rich food product for your garden.

Many of you already compost your allotment green waste, however some plot holders have flagged up the lack of a compost bin and/or not knowing how to compost as reasons why you don't. We will try to help...

## The right compost bin for you

If you don't want to make your own bin, there are many different types you can buy.

The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership has been able to negotiate discounted compost bins for Hertfordshire residents.

- Compost converter  
220 litre H90cm x D74cm  
£17.98
- Compost convertor  
330 litre H100cm D80cm  
£19.98



Both of these compost bins are available on a buy one get one half price offer, making them even better value for money.

To order your one of these compost bin(s) please visit [www.herts.getcomposting.com](http://www.herts.getcomposting.com) or telephone 0844 571 4444.

## Pick the perfect spot

It's best to site your compost bin on a level, reasonably sunny spot, on bare soil. This allows for better aeration and drainage, and makes it very easy for beneficial microbes and insects to gain access to the rotting material.

If you're worried about vermin becoming a problem, add a wire mesh base to your bin when you set it up.

## Put the right stuff in



Aim for about half of your compost bin contents to be

soft green materials such as vegetable peelings, fruit waste, grass cuttings and tea bags. The other half should include things such as cardboard egg boxes and scrunched up paper. These are slower to rot but provide vital fibre and carbon and also allow important air pockets to form in the mixture.



## Give it a good airing

Your compost heap will benefit from being regularly turned. This helps to aerate the compost, as well as mixing up the waste which will increase the rate of composting.

## Using your compost

Your compost is ready when it is dark brown and smells nice and earthy. It should also be slightly moist and have a crumbly texture. This can take 9 months to 2 years.

Your fresh compost is nutrient-rich food for your garden and will help improve soil structure, maintain moisture levels and keep your soils pH balance in check while helping suppress plant disease. It has everything your plants need!

## Improvements in 2015/16

25 new water tanks were installed to a number of sites. Hertford Road also benefitted from an improved water supply to the site.

Several sites had works to improve vehicle access.

Fairview Road, Lawrence Avenue and Elliot Road sites had new concrete bases installed to enable storing of materials.

New gates, including new pedestrian gate, have been installed at the Elliot Road site, and new notice boards were installed at Broxdell and Hertford Road.



## Friendly Bugs

Many insects are valuable pest predators but the following are some of the best:

**Lacewings:** Both the adults and larvae eat aphids and other soft-bodied insects.

**Ladybirds:** A single ladybird can eat 100 aphids a day and they will also consume whitefly, potato beetle, bean beetle and mealy bugs, amongst others.

**Hoverflies:** Most hoverfly larvae are ravenous hunters: each consumes around 900 aphids in its short life, together with scale insects and young caterpillars.

**Wasps:** Both solitary and social wasp species collect insect larvae, such as caterpillars, for food.

**Centipedes:** These feed on many ground-living and soil-dwelling insects and will also eat slugs and their eggs.

**Earwigs:** Often regarded as pests, earwigs actually prey on aphids, codling moth caterpillars and vine weevil eggs.

**Ground beetles:** These are often shiny black or metallic in colour with obvious grooves down the wing-cases. They are voracious predators of slugs and other pests.

## Waste Disposal

There should be very little non-compostable waste generated through allotment gardening. However, for waste that is generated there are options for disposal:

**Home:** you may choose to dispose of the waste through your refuse / recycling bins at home.

**Household Waste & Recycling Centre:** this site, on Caxton Way, is a free service, to residents, provided by Hertfordshire County Council. The site is closed on Thursdays and Fridays, but (with the exception of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day) is open every other day throughout the year from 10am - 6pm. During the summer the site is open on Saturdays from 8am - 6pm.

**Bring Banks:** In addition to the kerbside recycling service, provided by Stevenage Borough Council, recycling banks are located throughout the town. Most sites have facilities for cans, plastic, paper, cardboard and glass. For more details on locations of the recycling banks please visit <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/recycling-and-waste/recycling-banks/>.