

Handbook

Plot Owners Guide



Four Marks
Allotment Association

2026
fourmarksallotments.org.uk

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Committee



Chairperson

The Chairperson of the Allotment Committee provides leadership and direction to the Committee and the wider allotment community. The role oversees the effective management of the site, ensuring it operates in line with the constitution and represents the association in external matters.

Contact:
fmaachair@gmail.com



Secretary

The Allotment Committee Secretary plays a vital role in the smooth running of the Allotment Association. This position involves managing the administrative tasks of the Committee, ensuring effective communication between members, and maintaining accurate records of meetings and correspondence.

Contact:
fmaasecretary@gmail.com



Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for managing the financial affairs of the Allotment Association. This includes maintaining accurate financial records, overseeing income and expenditure, preparing budgets and reports and ensuring compliance with financial regulations. This role is essential for the financial health and sustainability of the allotment site.

Contact:
fmaa.financial@gmail.com



Membership Secretary

The Membership Secretary is responsible for managing all aspects of plot holder membership with the Allotment Association. This includes maintaining accurate records, handling applications and renewals, and ensuring effective communication with members. The role is key to fostering a welcoming and well-organised allotment community.

Contact:
fmaa.membership@gmail.com

Representatives



The Allotment Committee Representatives act as a liaison between plot holders and the Committee. This role involves representing the views and concerns of members, supporting the day-to-day running of the site and helping foster a positive and inclusive community environment. Each representative looks after a coloured zone, shown on the Plot Map at the back of this handbook.

“Fresh veg, fresh air, and a friendly community, that’s the FMAA promise.”



Welcome to Four Marks Allotments!

This handbook is your friendly guide. Whether you’re new to allotment life or a seasoned plot holder, consider this your go to for the essentials, what to expect, who to ask, and how to keep your plot thriving.

Why allotment gardening is worth it?

Allotment gardening is more than digging and planting, it’s fresh air, fresh food, and a proper mood boost. You’ll get outdoor exercise, homegrown veg, and a calm corner away from everyday noise. It’s also a brilliant way to show kids where food comes from and to practise sustainable living.

Community and learning

At the allotments you’ll meet gardeners with all kinds of experience, from first-timers to green-fingered experts. Most are happy to share tips, show techniques, and swap stories. The Committee helps keep the learning going by inviting guest speakers to the Annual General Meeting to share practical advice and inspiration.

Keeping your plot in shape

Tending an allotment takes regular time and effort. We know life gets busy, but plots left unattended can quickly become overgrown. All plot holders are expected to keep their plots to a reasonable standard. The Committee will inspect neglected plots and follow up where needed.

Practical checklist

- Visit regularly — even short, frequent visits beat one long catch-up.
- Weed and clear paths so your plot stays tidy and safe.
- Label plants to avoid confusion and help neighbours offer targeted advice.

If you need help

Life happens. If something prevents you from maintaining your plot, please reach out, either to fellow members or to the Committee. We’ll consider long-term issues sympathetically before making any tenancy decisions.

If you’re struggling: Tell us early. We can often find a short-term solution or point you to someone who can help.

Feedback and contact

We hope this handbook helps you settle in and enjoy your plot. The Committee welcomes suggestions for improvements. Your ideas make the site better for everyone.

Contact: fmaasecretary@gmail.com

Website: fourmarksallotments.org.uk

FINAL NOTE: Treat this handbook as a friendly roadmap - practical, not prescriptive. Grow, learn, and enjoy the patch of green you’ve claimed.



Quick tip:

If you’re stuck, ask a neighbour. Most people love to help and it’s the fastest way to learn.



How Four Marks Grew: A neighbourhood garden story

It all started in 2007. The Parish Council turned an Open Space contribution from the Meadowbrook development into something green and useful, a strip of land next to the Recreation Ground that would become Four Marks Allotments.

From blank field to busy plots

On 1 December 2007, a small team of Parish Councillors and future plot-holders set to work, sketching out 47 plots and paths that would become Rows A–D.

Instead of the traditional 10-pole plot (about 250m²), the group chose 5-pole plots (roughly 125m²) laid out as 9m x 14m rectangles with tidy 1m and 2m paths. A central plot, B16 was kept for communal use and social events, a smart nod to community-building from day one.

The early buzz: 2007–2008

Plot allocations kicked off in December 2007 and turf-cutting followed fast. By early 2008 the site was humming: new plot-holders were shaping beds, planting, and making the place their own. Accessibility was on the agenda too, four raised beds (C1A & C1B) were built for members with limited mobility, and a communal shed went up by the main entrance to house shared tools.

The inaugural Annual General Meeting was held on 1st March 2008 at the Benians Pavilion, during which the Four Marks Allotment Association (FMAA) was formally established and its Committee elected. The Committee was tasked with managing the site on behalf of the Parish Council.



“Small plots, big heart — that was the plan.”

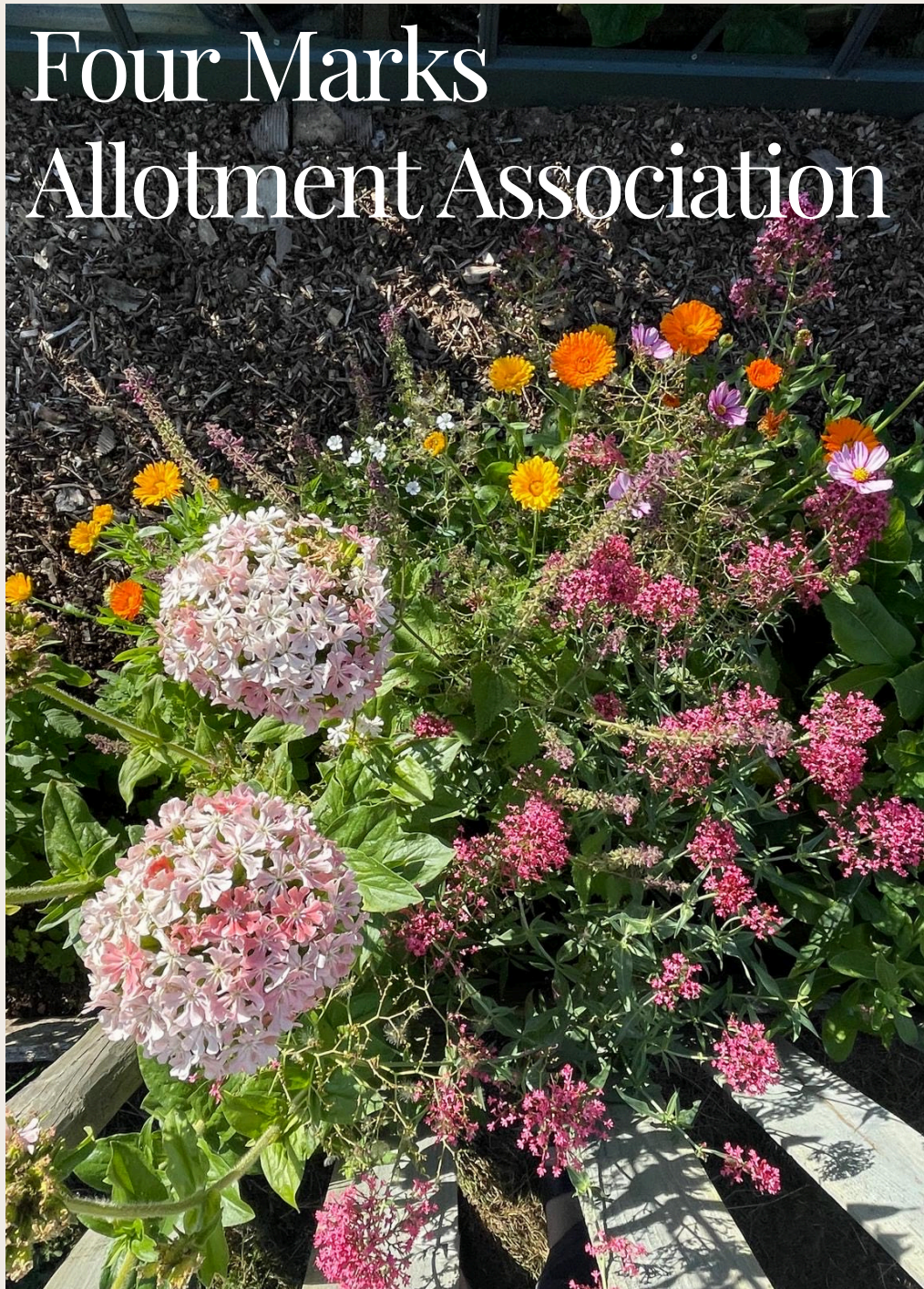
Community muscle: digging the water supply

In May 2008 volunteers dug a 200m trench to connect a water supply to the mains on the Barratts site. That DIY spirit set the tone. The Association would lead many of the site's improvements, with the Parish Council stepping in for bigger jobs like fencing, gates, and surfacing.

The site was expanded in 2009 (Row E) to accommodate growing demand, followed by a further extension (Row F) in subsequent years. Plot configurations have occasionally been adjusted, and the site now comprises 80 plots, including both full and half-sized options.



Four Marks Allotment Association



The Four Marks Allotments Association (FMAA) comprises residents of Four Marks who rent and cultivate allotment plots on land owned by the Four Marks Parish Council (FMPC), located adjacent to the Recreation Ground.



Governance and Structure

FMAA is administered by a Committee of elected plot holders acting on behalf of FMPC.

The Committee includes the following roles:

- Chairperson
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Membership Secretary
- Allotment Representatives
- FMPC Representative (non-voting)

Committee meetings are held bi-monthly.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held each March.

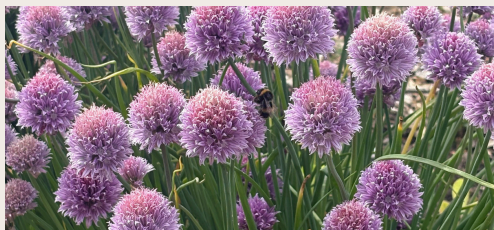
All committee members step down at the AGM but may seek re-election. Proposed changes to the Constitution or Rules must be approved by the membership at the AGM or a Special General Meeting. The Constitution can be found on our website, fourmarksallotments.org.uk and Rules can be found at the end of this book.

Membership and Fees

Plot holders are required to pay a one-time joining fee, refundable key deposit and an annual rental fee, all of which are reviewed periodically. Annual rent is due on 1st January.

Member Perks

A small card, a decent saving. Members are given their membership card every year, at the Annual General Meeting. Members get 10% off gardening products at Garthowen Garden Centre (minimum spend £20). A couple of caveats: the discount doesn't apply to already reduced items, gifts, or café purchases. Cards are issued every March, so pop it on your spring to-do list.





Site Security

In March 2024, the site gates were issued new padlocks. Keys were issued to members and are not duplicable by standard locksmiths. Additional keys may be requested via the Committee and must be authorised in advance. Replacement costs are borne by the requesting member. The code for the communal shed padlock is 2707.

Insurance

The Committee arranges annual insurance to cover:

- Third-party claims for bodily injury or property damage involving FMAA or its members
- Claims from voluntary helpers (e.g. during work parties)
- Allegations of wrongful acts against Committee members

Please note: this insurance does not cover individual members' personal property or accidents.

Maintenance and Volunteering

Pitch in, learn new skills, and keep the site humming. The Committee runs regular work parties to tackle maintenance tasks. Every session follows a risk assessment and a short safety briefing so everyone stays safe while getting things done.

Skills Register

We keep a register of members' skills from mechanical and plumbing to marketing and design. This allows us to call on the right person when a project needs a specialist touch.

Bulk Deliveries

We organise the heavy lifting so you don't have to. Each autumn the Committee lines up bulk deliveries of Progrow or mushroom compost, and we arrange woodchip drops from local tree surgeons. If there's more woodchip than we can use straight away, we compost the surplus for future seasons: smart, sustainable, and handy when you need a mulch top-up.

Raised Beds (C1A & C1B)

Designed for accessibility. These raised beds are reserved for members with restricted mobility and come with easy access to compost bins and a little tool storage in the nearby communal shed. If the soil needs topping up, the Committee will step in to replenish it so the beds stay productive and comfortable to use.



Quick tip:

If you've got a skill to share, add it to the register. It's a great way to help the site and meet fellow gardeners.

Communication Channels

Stay connected the easy way. We keep things informal and practical so you can swap tips, seeds, and spare produce without fuss.

- WhatsApp Community — The go-to for quick updates, offers of surplus produce, and last-minute produce swaps. Membership is managed by the Committee.
- Email Updates — Official notices and formal communications come from the Committee Chair or Secretary.

Facilities

Members may use the toilet at the Benians Pavilion. The padlock code is 1921.



Quick tip:

If you're heading to the site for a long session, bring a small kit (gloves, hand sanitiser, a spare bottle of water) — it makes a big difference on chilly or muddy days.

Communal Areas

- Orchard Area: Located near plot D15, this area contains apple and pear trees and is maintained by volunteers.
- Common Area (B16): Used for communal events such as the summer BBQ. Members may use the picnic benches and chairs. Grass cutting is done voluntarily.
- Communal Paths: Members are encouraged to maintain paths adjacent to their plots. The Committee oversees broader maintenance tasks such as hedge trimming and pothole repairs.



Communal Paths



Orchard Area

Community Note

Small, regular contributions from members keep these areas pleasant and usable for everyone. Even an hour now and then makes a big difference.



Communal Area

Health & Safety



Allotment gardening, while rewarding, involves inherent risks. Members are responsible for their own safety and must adopt a sensible and proactive approach to risk management, particularly when working alone. Ensure children wash hands after gardening activities.

Common Hazards and Smart Habits

- **Physical Strain:** Gardening can be physically demanding. Members should work within their capabilities and gradually build up endurance.
- **Sharp Objects and Tools:** Exercise caution with tools, broken glass, and other sharp items. Keep plots tidy to reduce trip hazards.
- **Protective Gear:** Wear gloves, sturdy footwear, and appropriate clothing. A first aid kit is available in the communal shed, but members are advised to keep basic supplies on their own plots.

- **Sun Exposure:** Use sun protection and stay hydrated during extended periods on site.
- **Lone Working:** Inform someone of your whereabouts and expected return time. Carry a mobile phone and always lock the gate upon entry and exit.

Infection Risks

Gardening may expose individuals to infections such as Legionellosis, Tetanus, Sepsis, and plant toxins. For guidance on minimising these risks, refer to the RHS website: [Minimising health risks in the garden – RHS](#).

Invasive Plants

Don't plant invasive species such as willow or bamboo. Keep buddleja deadheaded to stop it spreading. If you spot Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam, or similar invaders, report them to the Committee and the Local Council immediately. For seasonal pruning tips, refer to the Woodland Trust, RHS and Chris Bowers guides.

“Take it easy out there. Plants grow back, gardeners don’t!”



Chemical Use

Members are encouraged to minimise the use of chemical pesticides, fertilisers, and weed killers. For environmentally friendly gardening practices, consult:

- Controlling pests and diseases without chemicals – RHS
- Chemical-free organic gardening – The Wildlife Trusts

If chemicals are used:

- Confine usage to your own plot.
- Store chemicals in original containers, securely and out of reach of children.
- Dispose of surplus chemicals via East Hampshire Council's approved facilities.

Machinery, Bonfires, and Children

- Power tools: Only use machinery you know how to operate. Follow manufacturer instructions and report faults on the communal shed whiteboard or WhatsApp group.
- Bonfires: Strictly prohibited. Remove green waste from your plot or compost it responsibly.
- Children: Supervise children at all times. Keep sharp tools, canes, chemicals, and water containers out of reach and insist on handwashing after gardening.

Vandalism and Reporting

Lock the gates and report any vandalism to the police and the Committee. If you see a hazard or invasive species, flag it quickly — early action keeps everyone safer.

Bottom line: Use common sense, wear the right kit, and ask for help when you need it.

Data Protection

Short version: We only collect the personal details we need to run the allotments, we keep them safe, and you can see or remove them whenever you like.

Why this matters

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) set the standard for how organisations handle personal data from 25 May 2018. To manage plot tenancies and keep the site running smoothly, FMAA needs to hold a small amount of member information — and we do that the right way.

What we collect

Only the essentials: name; address; email; phone number; hosepipe dispensation status; and any records of plot inspection notices.

How we store it

Secure and tidy. Membership details live in a password-protected electronic database. We update records when needed and delete information that's no longer relevant.

Who can access your data

Limited access only. The database is available to a small group of Committee officers: Chair, Secretary, Membership Secretary, and Treasurer.

Your rights

You can request to review the personal data we hold about you at any time by contacting the FMAA Secretary. If something's wrong, tell us and we'll correct it.

Consent and deletion

When you join FMAA you give consent for us to hold the necessary data. Continuing membership and paying rent implies ongoing consent. When your tenancy ends, we destroy your personal data.

Final line: If you'd like this explained in plain paper form or want to make a data request, email the Secretary at fmaasecretary@gmail.com.

Changes to Contact Information

It is important for the Committee to hold the most current and up to date information. Please keep your details up to date by informing the Membership Secretary of any changes in your contact information.

 **Quick note**

If you want to see what we've got on file, just ask — we'll show you.

Understanding Allotment Rules

Your plot is covered by a legal framework, the Allotments Act 1992, your Tenancy Agreement, and the FMAA Constitution and Rules. These documents set out what's expected of every plot holder.

Inspections and Compliance

The Committee carries out regular inspections to make sure plots are being looked after and used as intended. Non-payment of rent or persistent neglect can lead to tenancy action, so it's best to stay on top of things or let us know if you're struggling. If a plot isn't up to standard or found to be in breach of the rules, we follow a clear, fair sequence:

1. Improvement Notice

You'll receive a formal letter listing the issues and asking for corrective action within 28 days.

2. Reinspection

If you fix the problems, the notice can be withdrawn. If not, we may issue a second notice or a repossession warning.

3. Final Notice

Continued non-compliance leads to a two-week notice of repossession, after which the plot can be reallocated to someone on the waiting list.

Need a hand?

If life gets in the way and you can't keep your plot up to standard, tell us early. Members facing temporary difficulties are encouraged to contact the Committee — we'll look for practical support or short-term arrangements to help you keep your plot where possible.

Contact: Email the Secretary at fmaasecretary@gmail.com.



Quick note

The Committee aims to be reasonable and transparent throughout all processes.

Livestock at Four Marks

Keeping animals on your plot is possible — but it's a responsibility, not a hobby. Our allotments are mainly for growing veg, fruit, and flowers, but with Committee approval you can keep a small number of animals that fit the site and the community.

Permitted animals

- Hens (no cockerels)
- Rabbits
- Honey bees

Before you bring animals on site

Get permission first. Contact the Committee before introducing any livestock. The Committee may carry out inspections, announced or unannounced, to check that animals are being kept humanely and safely.

Responsibilities of livestock keepers

If you keep animals, you must take full responsibility for their care and for any impacts they might have on others.

Key duties include:

- Insurance: Obtain appropriate cover for any damage or injury your animals might cause.
- Secure housing: Build enclosures that are safe, predator-proof, and suitable for the species.
- Emergency contacts: Provide a 24-hour phone number and other emergency details to the Committee.

Regulatory compliance: Keep up to date with animal welfare rules and follow any DEFRA emergency directives. DEFRA guidance is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs.

Beekeeping essentials

Bees are welcome, but they come with extra responsibilities:

- Permission required: Get Committee approval before placing hives.
- Qualifications: Hold a Certificate of Proficiency in Apiculture from the BBKA.
- Hive limits and siting: Keep hive numbers reasonable and place them only in approved areas.
- Costs and commitments: Expect expenses for hives, kit, protective clothing, insurance, and training.
- Local support: Joining the local BBKA branch is recommended — see www.meonvalleybeekeepers.co.uk.

Bottom line: Livestock can enrich the allotment experience, but only when kept responsibly and with the Committee's sign-off.



Quick tips

- Talk to neighbours before you introduce animals to avoid surprises.
- Plan for holidays — arrange reliable care if you'll be away.
- Keep records of vaccinations, treatments, and inspections to show you're meeting welfare standards.



Getting Started



Starting Out

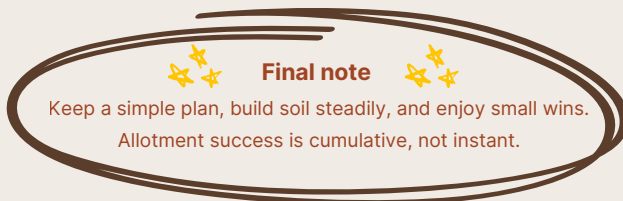
Start small, secure water access, build soil with compost, and plan crops by season; follow the step-by-step plot starter and try the seasonal recipes from page 19 for year-round allotment satisfaction.

Beginner tips

- Start small — a half plot is far easier to manage than a full plot and reduces overwhelm.
- Check site facilities: confirm water access, shed availability and any site rules before you commit.
- Clear and assess: tackle weeds in winter, map sunny/shaded areas, and mark paths to avoid compacting beds.
- Choose easy crops: potatoes, broad beans, courgettes, salad leaves and radishes give quick wins and build confidence.

Quick step-by-step guide to starting a plot

1. Apply and inspect — check waiting lists and site rules; choose a plot with water access if possible.
2. Clear in winter — Remove perennial weeds; leave cleared beds to weather if needed. If you wish to have a 'natural patch' on your plot, nettles or brambles could be cut back to grow stronger. If not remove by digging them up.
3. Plan layout — paths, beds, compost area, and a small tool shed; plan for rotation now.
4. Improve soil — add well-rotted compost and organic matter; consider raised beds if drainage is poor.
5. Start with hardy sowings — broad beans, early potatoes, onion sets, garlic and sow salads and radish for quick results.
6. Water and mulch — install a water butt or use site supply; mulch to conserve moisture and suppress weeds.
7. Record keeping — keep a simple plot diary: sowing dates, varieties, yields and pest notes.



No-Dig Method

No-dig gardening is based on a simple idea: leave the soil undisturbed and let nature do the heavy lifting.

Instead of digging or turning the ground, you build healthy soil from above by adding layers of compost or well-rotted organic matter, much like a forest floor naturally renews itself with fallen leaves.

A sheet of cardboard or a thick mulch is often used at the start to block light and suppress existing weeds, which gradually break down beneath the surface. As the compost sits on top, worms, fungi, and countless tiny organisms pull nutrients downward and create a rich, crumbly structure that plants love. Seeds and seedlings are planted directly into this top layer, where they root easily and grow into the thriving soil ecosystem below.

The benefits of this approach build year after year. Soil becomes healthier, richer in organic matter, and better at holding moisture, which means plants cope more easily with dry spells. Because the soil isn't disturbed, weed seeds remain undisturbed, staying on the surface, making them easier to remove.

The method is also far gentler on the body, avoiding the strain of digging and turning heavy soil. Environmentally, it's a more sustainable way to garden, reducing erosion, protecting soil life, and locking carbon into the ground rather than releasing it. Over time, no-dig beds tend to produce stronger, more resilient crops, all while creating a calmer, more wildlife-friendly plot. Many members follow the work of Charles Dowding, a avid gardener who is well practised in the art of No dig.

How to do it

1. Choose Your Growing Area

- Pick the spot where you want your bed.
- No need to clear weeds first — that's the beauty of no-dig.

2. Flatten the Ground

- Just press down tall weeds or grass.
- Remove only anything woody or very tall.

3. Lay Down Cardboard

- Use plain, brown cardboard with all tape removed.
- Overlap pieces so no light gets through.
- Water it so it sits flat and starts breaking down.

4. Add a Thick Layer of Compost

- Spread 3-4 cm of compost on top of the cardboard.
- Any compost works: homemade, green waste, well-rotted manure.
- This becomes your growing layer.



5. Plant or Sow

- For seedlings: make a small hole in the compost and pop them in.
- For seeds: sow directly into the compost layer.

6. Mulch Each Year

- Add another 1-2 cm of compost every winter or early spring.
- This feeds the soil, suppresses weeds, and keeps the structure perfect.

7. Let the Soil Life Do the Work

- Worms pull the compost down.
- Fungi and microbes build structure naturally.
- You avoid disturbing the ecosystem, so the soil improves every year.



Advanced Gardener Tips:

- Rotate crops annually to reduce pests and maintain soil fertility; plan a 3–4 year rotation for brassicas, roots, legumes and fruiting crops. If using a no dig method on your plot, crop rotation is not essential.
- Invest in soil testing and amend with targeted nutrients rather than blanket feeding; use green manures and deep composting to rebuild structure.
- Succession sowing and intercropping keep beds productive; use polytunnels or cloches to extend seasons and stagger harvests.
- Integrated pest management: encourage predators, use physical barriers, and monitor rather than spray as first response.
- Seed saving and heritage varieties reward patience and reduce costs; label and store seed in cool, dry conditions.

Gardeners' Friends: Insects

Beneficial insects are some of the hardest-working allies in any garden, quietly keeping the plot in balance while we get on with the fun parts. Ladybirds and their larvae devour aphids by the dozen, lacewings mop up soft-bodied pests, and hoverflies pollinate flowers while their young feast on sap-suckers. Ground beetles patrol the soil surface at night, tackling slugs, snails, and other nibblers, while solitary bees and bumblebees ensure reliable pollination for everything from broad beans to fruit trees. Even tiny parasitic wasps play a role, laying their eggs inside troublesome caterpillars and keeping populations in check. By creating a welcoming environment with flowers, mulch, and undisturbed corners, gardeners can encourage this natural workforce to thrive, reducing the need for chemicals and helping the whole plot stay healthy and productive.





Leek & Potato Patch Pie

Ingredients

- 3 large leeks, sliced
- 500g potatoes, diced
- 1 onion
- 1 tbsp butter
- 300ml vegetable stock
- 150ml cream or milk
- Puff pastry
- Thyme, salt, pepper

Method

Sauté onions and leeks in butter.

Add potatoes and stock; simmer until tender.

Stir in cream and thyme.

Top with pastry and bake at 200°C until golden.

Carrot Top Pesto

Starter - Serves 6 - 10 min

Carrot tops are full of flavour, and like the leaves of other roots (e.g. celeriac or beetroot) if they're in reasonable nick, they're good to eat - so don't throw them on the compost. Pick off and discard the larger stems, keeping the feathery leaves. This pesto is great tossed through pasta, or drizzled over roasted carrots, new potatoes or greens. Try crumbling Mozzarella, Feta or Manchego over the top too.

Ingredients

leafy tops from 1 bunch of carrots, larger stems discarded, feathery leaves chopped

small handful basil leaves, or try parsley or chervil for a different flavour

50g walnuts, hazelnuts or almonds

25g Parmesan, or vegetarian equivalent

1 garlic clove

approx. 100ml or so olive oil

salt and pepper

Method

Prep time: 10 min

Step 1

In a food processor, blitz the carrot tops, basil, nuts, parmesan and garlic.

Step 2

Gradually add enough oil to make a pesto consistency.

Step 3

Season to taste.

www.riverford.co.uk/recipes/carrot-top-pesto

kitchen



Basic Chutney

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 2 hours

Total Time: 2 hours 15 minutes

Servings: 90

Equipment

Large preserving pan, saucepan,
spice bag or muslin cloth and string

Ladle

Stainless steel jam funnel

Slow cooker or Crock Pot I used a 4 to

6 person (4.7 litre) CrockPot.

4 x 450g Sterilised jam jars



Ingredients

1 kg fruit or vegetables of your choice

500 g apples – about 3 medium apples

500 g onions diced – about 3 medium onions

200 g sultanas or raisins

1 tsp chilli flakes optional

25 g fresh ginger grated optional

2 tsp salt

400 ml vinegar

400 g sugar

2 tsp coriander seeds An alternative to
coriander, mustard and black peppercorns, is a
total of 2 tablespoons of your preferred spices.

2 tsp mustard seeds

2 tsp black peppercorns

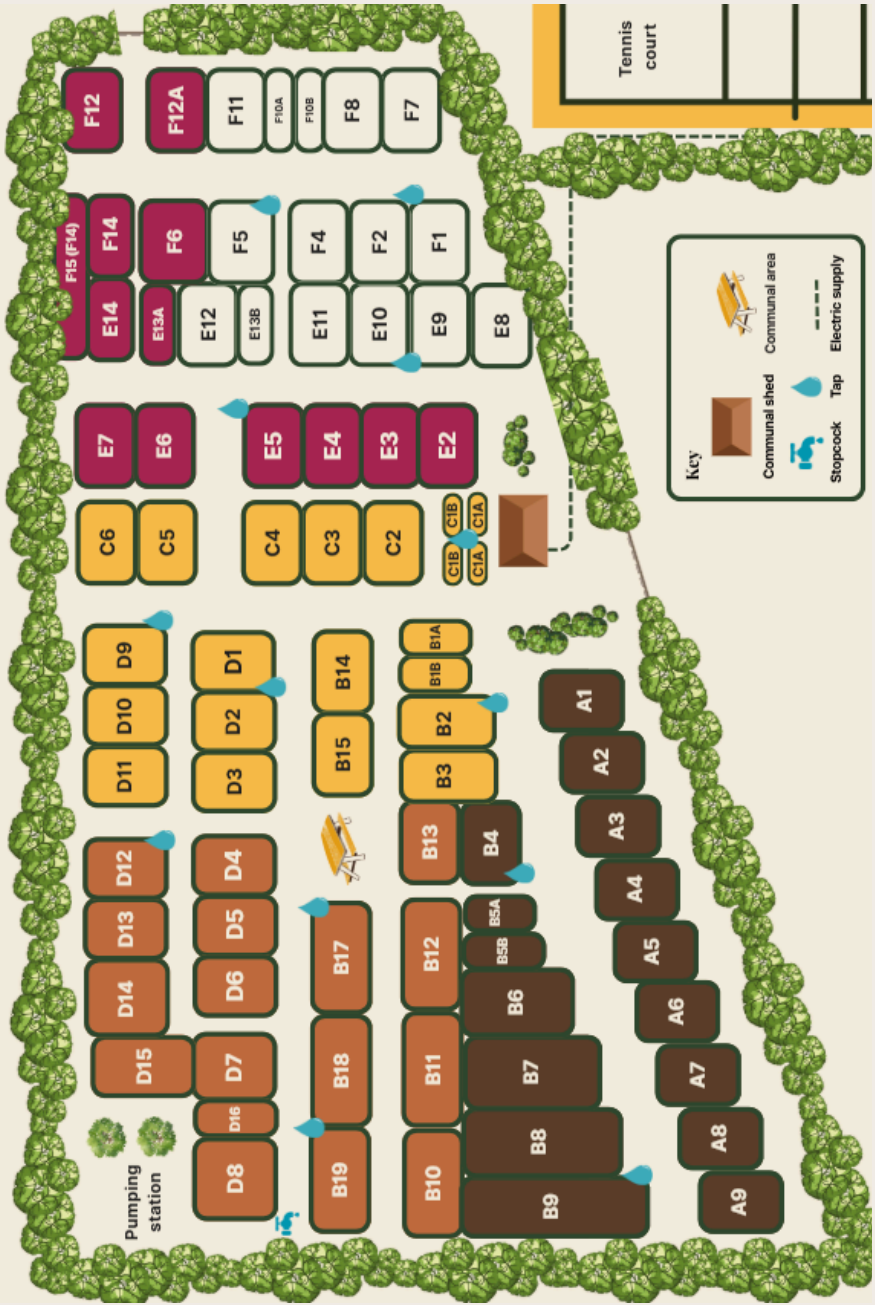
Instructions

1. Cut your vegetables and fruit into roughly the same size pieces so they cook evenly.
2. Add diced vegetables and sultanas (and chilli flakes, sea salt and grated ginger if using) to a large preserving pan.
3. Make up your spice bag by tying the spices in a large muslin square or use a ready made bag. Add to the pan.
4. Pour in the cider vinegar, give everything a good stir and slowly bring to the boil.
5. Turn the heat down to low and stir in the sugar until it's completely dissolved.
6. Let the chutney mixture simmer for at least 1 ½ to 2 hours. Stir every now and then to prevent chutney sticking to the bottom of the pan.
7. Check for thickness by drawing a silicone spatula or wooden spoon through the chutney mixture. Your chutney is ready when it parts to reveal the pan base and this remains visible for a few seconds.
8. Whilst chutney is still hot, ladle into sterilised jars and fill to within 6mm (1/4" inch) of the top. Use the back of a spoon to pack down your chutney and remove any air pockets.
9. Seal tightly with a lid and label when cold.

www.talesfromthekitchenshed.com

Plot Map

Wildlife corridor



Allotment Rules

1. AGREEMENT

- 1.1 All members are subject to the Rules and Constitution of the Four Marks Allotment Association (FMAA).
- 1.2 The allotments are managed by the FMAA on behalf of Four Marks Parish Council.

2. FEES AND TENANCY

- 2.1 Rents run from January to December and are reviewed annually. Rents are to be paid in advance by the 1st January each year. Plots taken up on or after 1st June will be charged half the annual amount for that year. Plots taken up on or after 1st September will not be charged an annual rent for the remainder of that year.
- 2.2 In addition to the rent, all new Tenants will be required to pay a one off, non-refundable joining fee, also reviewed annually and a deposit for keys to the Allotments which will be refunded on the surrender of the plot and return of the key.
- 2.3 A condition of tenancy is residence within the civil parish boundary of Four Marks or having a Four Marks postal address (e.g. properties on/off The Shrave lie within the Chawton Parish Boundary but have Four Marks postcodes. The Tenant shall inform the Membership Secretary of any change of address, which, if it is to an address outside of the Four Marks postal address area, will result in the requirement to hand back their plot.
- 2.4 The Tenant shall also inform the Membership Secretary if they do not wish to renew their tenancy or wish to hand back their plot at any time during the year. No refunds will be given in respect to joining or rental fees.
- 2.5 No Tenant may sub-let a plot.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

- 3.1 It is a requirement of your tenancy to cultivate your plot and to keep it tidy by removing litter and rubbish, and controlling weeds and grass regularly so they do not seed and cause problems for other gardeners.
- 3.2 Areas not under cultivation may be covered with proprietary materials designed for the purpose such as sheeted black polythene or weed suppressant sheeting which must be properly secured. These materials are not allowed to be buried under the soil in cultivation areas but may be used as a base for plot walkways to be left bare or covered in wood chip/chippings. Rubber-backed carpet must not be used as the backing and carpet may rot down releasing harmful chemicals into the soil and causing pollution. In any case such measures are intended for short-term use or overwintering beds only.
- 3.3 All green waste should be composted where it is practical to do so and members are encouraged to use bins (or other) to compost as much of their green material as possible. Members are responsible for removing any other waste from their plots. Dumping anywhere on the site or in the surrounding areas is strictly prohibited and will be regarded as a serious breach of the rules and may result in termination of membership.
- 3.4 Each member is reminded that they have a duty of care towards other members, and any members of the public who may be on site.
- 3.5 Members should minimise the use of chemicals on their plots and ensure that they follow environmentally friendly practices. If you do use chemicals, you must prevent any drift onto other plots and follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding their use and disposal. They should always be stored in their original marked containers, well out of reach of children and locked away.
- 3.6 Trees must be pruned annually at the time appropriate for their species and in a manner recommended by the Royal Horticultural Society or other authority. Pruning may not take place while any bird is nesting in the tree. The tree after pruning must not exceed 2.5 metres high. Trees must be planted sufficiently far from the boundary of the plot to allow for lateral growth and such growth must remain within the boundaries of the plot. Any lateral growth onto pathways or neighbouring plots must be cut back.

- 3.7 Members' children are welcome on the site, if properly supervised at all times
- 3.8 Bonfires are not permitted, except in exceptional circumstances on the authority of the Committee.
- 3.9 It is the responsibility of each member to ensure that the gate is locked by themselves or another upon entry and exit.
- 3.10 Only members are authorised to enter the site. Members may invite guests onto the site (if accompanied by the member) and are responsible for ensuring that their guest(s) abide by the FMAA rules.
- 3.11 Plot holders wishing to independently order and arrange delivery of bulk/bulky items to the car park or allotment gates must seek approval from the Committee before ordering such items. The Committee will liaise with the Parish Council and approval cannot be guaranteed where such deliveries could cause damage to council owned land or cause undue obstruction.
- 3.12 Use of the lawnmowers or other communal equipment provided is at your own risk. If unfamiliar with the use of such power tools, members are advised to refer to the instructions provided and/or request an orientation session.
- 3.13 Members should only use powered machine tools (e.g., mowers/strimmer's) during daylight hours and no earlier/later than 8am/8pm to avoid disturbance to neighbouring residential properties.
- 3.14 Members are responsible for the safety and security of their own equipment stored on their plot or in the communal areas. The Committee will accept no responsibility for members' lost or damaged equipment. Members must also ensure that tools, and equipment are used and stored carefully and securely to avoid injury to themselves and others.
- 3.15 Smoking is not permitted in the communal shed.
- 3.16 The Association has Public Liability Insurance cover, but personal accident and property insurance cover is the responsibility of the member. Only members are covered by public liability insurance.
- 3.17 Petrol for FMAA lawn mowers will be paid for from FMAA funds. This fuel may not be used for personal equipment.
- 3.18 The use of the allotment or any part for the purpose of trade or business is not permitted except that the sale of fruit or vegetable at local events for the benefit of the Association is allowed.

4. SHEDS, GREENHOUSES AND OTHER STRUCTURES

- 4.1 Wire mesh fencing, posts and rails are allowed around plots or individual beds up to a maximum height of 1.0 m. If erected, these fences must be maintained by the member and not allowed to overhang onto paths or other plots. No barbed wire may be used on site.
- 4.2 Hedges are permitted so long as they are of neat appearance and well maintained. The Association will treat a line of trees, bushes or shrubs as a hedge. All hedges (and individual bushes/shrubs) must be cut at least annually and must not exceed 1.25 metres high after cutting. Cutting may not take place if birds are nesting.
- Hedges (and individual bushes/shrubs) must be planted sufficiently far from the boundary of the plot to allow lateral growth and such growth must remain within the boundaries of the plot. Any lateral growth onto pathways or neighbouring plots must be cut back.
- 4.3 The netting of crops and use of fruit cages is permitted up to a maximum height of 2.0m
- 4.4 One shed plus a greenhouse (preferably with plastic panes) OR poly tunnel are permitted on plots with prior written permission from the FMAA Committee. For plot holders permitted to keep chickens, a hen house (in lieu of a shed) may be requested. An application for permission to erect a structure must be completed in all cases. All sheds must comply with the following:
- No permanent structure base is permitted, e.g. concrete.
 - Maximum shed size is 8' x 6' (2.5m x 1.8m) with maximum height of 7' (2.1m)
 - Maximum greenhouse or poly tunnel size is 2m x 3m (6' 7" x 9' 10") with a maximum height of 2m (6' 7").
 - Any hybrid shed/greenhouse structure must conform to the above dimensions for each element.
 - Hen houses may be larger, up to 8' x 10' (2.5m x 3m) with a maximum height of 7' (2.1m).

- Structures must be professionally manufactured.
- The colour of structures should be such as to minimise their visual impact.
- Structures must be maintained in good condition or the Committee will require their removal at the Tenants' expense.
- At the end of the tenancy the Committee may allow the outgoing Tenant to leave it on the plot if it is in good condition and if the incoming Tenant agrees. Otherwise, the Committee will require their removal at the outgoing Tenants expense.
- Structures should not shade any part of an adjoining plot at any time of the day.

*** Rules for Structures updated in March 2019 (no retrospective action to be taken).

5. WATER

5.1 Standpipes are distributed around the site for members to water their plots. These are for the equal and shared benefit of all members and the practice of stockpiling several watering cans at one time to the exclusion of other members is not permitted.

5.2 The cost of water is a significant proportion of the rent. Excessive mains water usage may result in annual rents being increased. As such, members are encouraged to minimise mains water usage by improving water retention within the soil and by collecting rainwater from shed roofs or similar. Hosepipes may NOT be connected to the mains water supply without the written permission of the Committee (e.g. in the case of a disability preventing the use of a watering can). This permission may be withdrawn at any time at the discretion of the Committee.

5.3 Water supplies will be turned off during the winter months (as a guide usually 1st October to 1st March). The stopcock is between plots D8 and B19.

6. ANIMALS AND LIVESTOCK

6.1 Permission from the Committee is required to keep Livestock.

6.2 Bees may be kept on site by suitably qualified persons with special permission (among the requirements for permission are a controlled flight path and adequate insurance).

6.3 Dogs are permitted onto allotment sites but owners must keep them on a lead: they must be kept on the owner's plot and prevented from causing any nuisance to other members or danger to children. Owners must remove droppings from site.

7. PLOT INSPECTIONS

7.1 Committee members regularly inspect all plots during the growing season (March – October) to ensure that the majority of the plot is being cultivated and cropped. There is no set style of gardening and a plot is deemed satisfactory so long as it is under control and being used for growing plants, whether vegetables, fruit or flowers.

7.2 It must be demonstrated that more than 50% of the plot area is being productively used over the course of the growing season (definitions of non-productive use include grassed areas, pathways and empty and/or weed overgrown beds).

7.3 The plots will also be assessed throughout the year for levels of weed growth and unmanaged grassy areas, any waste/rubbish and general compliance with other FMAA rules.

7.4 Plot holders are encouraged to let the Committee know if there are good reasons why they cannot work their plot. There can then be informal discussions and arrangements made that could allow them to continue with their plot.

7.5 For any plot failing an inspection, the Tenant will be issued with an improvement notice and will be required to take appropriate steps to address the identified issue(s).

7.6 The criteria for assessing plots are as follows:

- Cultivation
- Weeds/Grass management
- Waste/Rubbish
- Other FMAA rule breaches

7.7 The formal administration procedure for a sub-standard plot is:

- i. **Letter 1** – an improvement notice, reminding the Tenant of the rules, and requiring the identified issue(s) to be addressed within 28 days. Also asks the Tenant to acknowledge receipt of the notice and report any mitigating circumstances, so that an allowance can be made, if appropriate.
- ii. **Reinspection** after 28 days may result in the notice being rescinded if all the necessary improvements have been made; or a further 28-day notice if good progress is being made; or a Letter 2
- iii. **Letter 2** – gives two weeks' notice of repossession if improvement notice actions have not been addressed. Notice may be rescinded if the plot has been brought fully up to standard within that time.
- iv. **Improvement notices** contained in Letter 1 will remain on record for a period of one year from date of issue and will be re-activated in the event of a re-occurrence of the issue(s) previously identified. In this case, tenants will be issued with a further letter giving two weeks' notice of repossession. A notice may be rescinded if the plot has been brought fully up to standard within that time.

7.8 If a Tenant is unable to maintain the plot for whatever reason, the Secretary should be notified in writing. If the problem is of a short-term nature, arrangements may be made by the Tenant for others to maintain the plot. Failing this the Committee may be asked to provide assistance by asking other members. If arrangements cannot be made either by the Tenant or by the Committee for the work to be carried out or, if the problem is of a long-term nature, the plot may be taken back and re-let to someone on the waiting list. No refunds will be given in respect to joining or rental fees.

8. CORRESPONDENCE

8.1 Written correspondence to any member of the Committee should be sent to: fmaasecretary@gmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read
our handbook.



Wishing everyone a happy and fulfilling time on their plots. May your plants thrive, your harvests be generous, and your days here full of fresh air, friendly faces, and the simple pleasure of growing.

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