Allotments in Birmingham

Birmingham City Council owns around 100 allotment sites around the city (10 are in the process of 'moving' to Sutton Coldfield). Most areas have at least one site but there are fewer in inner areas. People wanting a plot cannot guarantee there will be one nearby with plots available and the more popular ones have waiting lists.

The sites are often hidden behind houses or shops and up a long track so many local people may be completely unaware they are there. Some are tiny – between 6 and 20 plots, while others have over 100 plots. Plots too can vary in size from raised beds of around 10 square metres to large plots of over 500 square metres! A typical Standard Plot is around 250 square metres and that's big enough to grow a lot of fruit, vegetables and flowers for your family and friends. Plots are not available for commercial growing or businesses, but can be rented to charitable organisations, schools and colleges.

If you want to find out more about the availability of plots near where you live, go on to the BDAC website: www.bdacallotments.co.uk, and find the map of Birmingham sites on "Looking for a plot? It could be just 5 clicks away."

What's involved in renting a plot and how much does it cost?

Anyone over 18 can rent a plot – it's a legal tenancy agreement renewed each year, subject to certain conditions such as paying the annual rent and keeping to the Allotment Rules. Rent for a Standard Plot is now £119 paid in advance in October for the year ahead. It's less for smaller, more for larger plots. For over 65s, the rental is just over half price (£62 - 2025/26). Some people think it's a lot to find at once, but bear in mind that urban land is very valuable if sold to developers, and currently a lot is set aside for growing by individual Birmingham residents so we need to appreciate that.

The majority of the sites have associations which elect a committee from their members to manage the site on behalf of everyone who has a plot. This role is all done on a voluntary basis. The Committees should ensure that the site is a good place to be, working with the Council to keep it safe and secure. Associations may charge a membership fee – such as £10 a year – so they have funds to manage the site and make improvements. They may also run fundraising activities such as events and plant sales, or secure grants to do the more expensive work on a site such as put up buildings and storage facilities.

Taking on a plot is an investment which takes time to produce the results you want – such as fresh organic fruit and veg, a nice place to chill out etc. Most vacant plots take a lot of time and effort to establish because they are often overgrown. There are many expenses in the early days – tools and equipment, a shed if there isn't one already, seeds and plants. So before you invest too much time and money on a plot, you need to decide early on whether you enjoy the 'allotment experience' and have the time to maintain the size of plot you have taken on,

Options for people without a lot of time to spare- or special requirements

People with jobs, family commitments and other interests may struggle to maintain a Standard Plot. Standard Plots could also be too much for people with disabilities or health conditions which impact on what they can manage all the year round. Some sites offer other alternatives such as Small Plots (half Standard size), Miniplots and Raised beds. A few sites have Gardening Clubs or Community Plots which enable people to do allotment gardening without the responsibility and commitment needed for a typical tenancy.

For people with children, bear in mind that gardening may not appeal to all your children as a hobby/activity and that sites don't provide play facilities or activities for children of plotholders. So take that into account in deciding what size plot you can manage if your children don't want to come regularly. Sometimes the time isn't right for renting plots because you have too many other calls on your time. But don't worry – you can always turn to allotment gardening in later years when caring commitments may be fewer, and many pensioners find a new lease of life when they retire.

For people with no previous gardening or allotment experience, find out what is available and take advice before you commit to anything. Look at the BDAC website: https://bdacallotments.co.uk; email the BDAC on bdac.allotments@gmail.com or ring 07861 144674 to find out more.

Support for plotholders

Anyone who is a seasoned gardener will tell you it is a very special community which brings together from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds. People on allotment sites tend to share their experience, knowledge and tips as well as being generous with their spare seeds, plants and harvests. That is the most valuable source of support on a well-run allotment site.

Also if the site's Allotment Association is a member of the National Allotment Society (NAS), plotholders can order seeds at a discount from Kings Seeds, a company linked to the NAS. Some sites have shops or stores where people can buy a variety of gardening items, usually at more reasonable prices than garden centres or supermarkets.

Equipment and tools – good ones – are usually expensive, so find out if you can borrow ones on the site or friends and family, BEFORE you buy, or see what is available second-hand. For example, Tools to Africa based in Kings Heath Park renovates and sells old tools and these are often better than new ones! (Contact info@sbtfa.org.uk for how to find them)

Sheds, polytunnels and greenhouses are a big investment – best to delay buying these until you are sure you are there for the long-term. And find out from other plotholders what is worth it because often it's a false economy to buy something that only lasts a year or two before weather damage makes it unusable.