

# A year in the life of our first allotment

Like many people we spent a lot of time in our garden during the first lockdown. We built crates, and grew tomatoes, lettuce, and beans in abundance. This renewed our desire to do this on a slightly bigger scale. Our name had been on the allotment waiting list for several years. We were therefore really excited to receive a call in September offering us a plot that would soon become vacant.



We viewed this plot and saw the enormity of the task. It was well overgrown, something that is quite common when people take on allotment plots. We were extremely lucky that the previous owner had left us a shed with lots of tools and seeds, and a greenhouse and we are very grateful to them for this.



We took over our plot in November, the perfect time of year to start digging up, and it gave us something to do in yet another lockdown. As someone who is clinically vulnerable to covid, this provided us with an ideal safe space outdoors, away from the house, something to focus on in



difficult times. We noticed the benefits of our hard work of digging, weeding, raking, and carrying wheelbarrow loads of sods away. We did a little bit each week, focusing on an area a couple of metres square each time, and slowly it all came together and suddenly started taking shape. This meant we could then start digging in our manure so it was ready for planting in spring.



The benefits of having a greenhouse meant that we could do some winter planting in there. We started with a bed of baby spinach, pack Choi, lettuces, carrots and herbs, using plastic storage containers that we found around the plot. Online guides provided all the information we needed. We also set up a way of collecting rainwater using containers from the site.



We then set about making our beds. Not everyone will form their allotment in this style, but our previous owner had done it this way, so we were happy to go with this for this year. We had been left lots of wood which we able to repurpose, using it to restore some of the border edges. We also repaired the shed roof, and laid paving flags which we had dug out of the ground, to make a path for when the ground was more muddy.





In the spring with planting timetable in hand, we started planting the seeds. At first, only weeds seemed to grow, and this went on for quite a while which was disheartening. Anything that did come through seemed to get eaten instantly. Eventually, after putting up some netting, some seedlings came through and it became more obvious what were weeds and what were seedlings - an app was also useful for identifying these. We found out that there is a three month window for most seeds to be sown, so if they don't work out the first time more can be planted. Also local garden centres sell seedlings, so after our third attempt at sowing broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and sprouts, and working out that we needed a fine net in place, we had much more success.



In our first summer, we have had an abundance of courgettes, and given loads away to family, friends, the local food bank, and local food exchange programmes. We have also done really well with our cauliflower, cabbages, green beans, onions, leeks, peas, turnips, swede, potatoes, rhubarb, raspberries, and sweetcorn. It's amazing to eat these straight off the plant. They taste so different. We have really enjoyed the produce of our labour and there is nothing nicer than a Sunday lunch where most things on the plate are homegrown. There is also a zero miles footprint so we feel we are doing our bit for the environment too.





There certainly has been some labour involved, and we go up to the allotment a lot to either weed, pick, hoe, or dig. Having an allotment is certainly not an occasional hobby! However, we find it extremely rewarding. There is also a fantastic therapeutic aspect to tending to the land, being in nature, and growing things, and it has been extremely helpful during this time of home working to have a change of scenery.

We have also expanded our palate and tried some foods that we don't usually buy, like globe artichoke which was a big success and we ate it French style. We have loved eating corn on the cob.



Our fellow allotmenters are a lovely friendly bunch of amazing people, who give advice, seedlings, and help with watering when needed. Having an allotment has a lovely social element to it as well we have discovered. We have also been given some Jerusalem artichoke plants which we are very much looking forward to trying in the autumn, as well as some runner beans, and raspberry bushes.



We have worked through the challenges this year of our brassicas being demolished, and have learnt a lot in the process. We are excited to start trying some new fruits and vegetables next year, and are thinking of growing some aubergines, sweet potatoes and blueberries, and we very much look forward to being able to enjoy our apples, plums and asparagus next year which we planted this.





It has been calmly reassuring when already the news is reporting possible supply issues at Christmas, to have my green beans in the freezer and potatoes, carrots and parsnips and sprouts growing ready for our Christmas dinner.

We look forward to our pumpkins and squash which are currently getting bigger each day, and think how wonderful nature is.



Anyone thinking about taking on an allotment, I would urge you to put your name down on the list. This is the first step. Lists are usually many years long, so there's no harm taking this first step. Taking on an overgrown plot can be very daunting at first, but tackling it a little bit at a time, you will soon notice success. Working out what to plant can be daunting, but the Internet has lots of resources, as well as fellow allotmenters who I'm sure will give you lots of advice.



We have really enjoyed our first year being allotment holders and can't wait for the next growing year. We now have replanted our spinach beds and planted carrots in tubs so we can make use of our greenhouse over winter. It has certainly been hard work, but is well worth it, and you reap lots and lots of benefits. It is also free regular exercise!



Before



Now