|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **CRAIGENTINNY ALLOTMENTS:**  **information for plot holders** |

**The site**

* The Craigentinny allotment site is located in the north of the city just off Findlay Gardens (by the bus stop). The site was created from part of the neighbouring golf course during, or shortly before or after, World War Two. Previously it was farmland pasture. The gate is at the north end of the site. The golf course is towards the Forth estuary to the east, there is a patch of woodland at the south end, and houses along the west side.
* The site location is:

OS grid reference: NT284753; X co-ordinate:328437; Y co-ordinate: 675332

* The site now has 46 plot units, about half a dozen of which are divided into two. In addition to the plots, we have a ‘communal area’ with a shed, a pond, a barbecue site, a stone building where we store our collective equipment (see below), and some fruit trees. The gate key also unlocks the doors of the shed and the store. Water is provided from standpipes situated along both the main pathways. The water is turned off in the winter months (usually from sometime in October until the end of March).

**Growing conditions**

* The soil quality and composition varies across the site, some being quite basic clay (which sticks to tools when over-wet, and is hard to break up when over-dry), while soil on other plots is much lighter. Some of the plots at the far (south) end of the site can get quite damp in wet years.
* Having been cultivated intensively for well over half a century, most plots are capable of producing very good quality vegetables, soft fruit and flowers. This is especially so if topped up by an annual layer of compost – and one of the shared activities of the plot holders has been, each year, usually in February or March, to organise, at a cheaper than standard rate, bulk purchase of (roughly) one cubic metre bags of compost from a local supplier (watch out for information on this in the email circulations).

**Wild vegetation and animal life**

Flowers

* Intensive cultivation means that there are no good patches of wildflowers (though there have been discussions about creating a specific wild flower area on the communal plot). However, many plot holders now grow flowers on their holdings, hoping to attract bees and butterflies by sowing wildflower mixes or species that offer good quantities of pollen and nectar to their visitors (if you want to do this, it is best to avoid varieties with double flowers).
* On the hedgerows along the golf course edge and between some plots, there are dog-roses and many bramble/blackberry bushes which flower well, with lots of pollen, and produce good crops of fruit in most years.

‘Weeds’

* In general, plots that have been regularly cultivated are relatively free of gardeners’ greatest hates. We have only a small amount of ground elder, currently no hogweed or balsam, and most of the site has now eradicated rose-bay willowherb (very tall with pinkish-red flowers - IF YOU HAVE IT, HOWEVER PRETTY IT IS, PLEASE DON’T LET IT SEED!). Couch grass returns fairly rapidly in any neglected areas, and it needs persistence to remove as much as possible even of the tiny roots – note that rotavating is not advisable, because it spreads small pieces of root further, from which new growth rapidly appears.
* There are also some patches of stinging nettles, some kept deliberately because they provide food for the caterpillars of some butterflies (we had a large number of tortoiseshell caterpillars a few years ago).
* The one really persistent weed problem, and so far only on the upper half of the site) is Horsetail (or Marestail). This was apparently introduced deliberately many years ago by a former plot holder, intending to use it to make a cosmetic. Inevitably, it escaped. Some plots are now heavily infested, and, in spite of many efforts to control it, it has continued to spread slowly down the site. Various chemical treatments have been applied in the past, with only limited success, and the only certain way of limiting its impact is regular and repeated removal of the shoots from as deep down as possible, preferably as soon as they appear. Removed shoots must not be composted, because that will simply spread it further.

Animal wildlife

* Since April 2021, we have collectively been gathering information about the mammals, birds, insects, etc. of all kinds which have been seen on or flying over or near our site. Initially, a monthly report, circulated to all plot holders, was produced, summarizing all reported sightings in each month. Recently, we have changed to what will probably be a slightly less frequent ‘Wildlife News’, with more pictures and background information particularly about new or more unusual/unexpected finds.

Mammals

* The site usually has at least one fox (in 2021, a pair had four cubs on the cite). Foxes seem to do little serious damage (though they can be a nuisance for example digging up newly planted onions) and they certainly help to keep down any intruding rats (or, indeed, rabbits, should any ever appear). However, they do find or bring in, and then bury, golf balls, especially in recently prepared beds. Most of us who have plots along the golf course edge reckon to find anything up to half a dozen new buried golf balls every year (presumably the foxes think they are eggs, though they never seem to learn!??).
* (Picture of Fox)
* Badgers have been discouraged, because they dig up potatoes and strip soft fruit bushes. The slabs under the main gate to the site were put there to stop them digging their way in at that point.
* We don’t have hedgehogs, and this is generally considered to be a good thing, because of the use by some plot holders of slug-killing chemicals – and slugs and large snails can play havoc with a wide range of vegetables if no measures are taken to keep them out. If you feel it essential to use a chemical slug killer, please only use an ‘organic-endorsed’ ferric phosphate one, and never metaldehyde (which will anyway be banned from next year). Various non-chemical discouragements can be found on relevant websites – coffee grounds seem quite effective at least for a period of time; beer traps certainly work very well.
* We do sometimes have rats and wood mice. The mice can be a nuisance, particularly by eating peas. Rats can cause considerable damage to crops, and can spread disease, so the City Council has a policy of seeking to eliminate them from its allotment sites. Anyone who sees one is asked to email the Meetings Secretary (see below), and CEC will send someone to put down poison bait – please therefore be aware of the need to keep children and pets from touching the bait boxes.

Birds

* Our birds provide a lot of joy and amusement (the one exception perhaps is woodpigeons, which, given the chance, will rapidly strip leaves from cabbages and other brassicas and peas, and will also take off gooseberries and other fruit – though they often do not eat them; also worth noting here is that blackbirds love unprotected strawberries and raspberries, so strawberries at least really need netting too).
* Among the commoner more beneficial species are great and blue tits (which each breed in at least one nest box on the site), blackbirds, which usually manage at least one nest every year, families of long-tailed tits, dunnocks, robins, wrens (which also breed), goldfinches (which at some times of year sing in groups almost endlessly from the treetops), house sparrows and starlings (which eat many insects and grubs, though they may also occasionally damage crops), and magpies and crows (which probably do some damage, but also probably quite a bit of good).

Insects

* In 2020, eleven different species of butterflies were seen at least once on the site, including Speckled Woods (see below), which are not now very common in our part of Scotland

(Picture of Butterfly)

* As would be expected, we have lots of small white butterflies, itching to lay eggs on our cabbages and other brassicas – these plants do need to be netted or caged to avoid potentially serious damage (though woodpigeons are worse - see above). Other butterflies which occur regularly in small numbers are Orange Tips, Small Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals, Peacocks and Painted Ladies. We also have quite a few species of moth, the star of which in 2020, though only as a caterpillar, was the Elephant Hawk Moth (below).

(Picture of Elephant Hawk Moth)

* But our commonest insects are at least three different kinds of bumble bees. And we also have ladybirds, though not as many as might be expected.
* Probably the commonest insect pest that most of us suffer from is the carrot root fly. The whitish tiny larvae of these small insects hatch from eggs deposited in the ground beneath the plants by their mothers, who ate attracted by the smell of the carrots. The grubs rapidly eat all the side roots of the plants, and the plants then go reddish, wilt and die. Parsnips can also be affected, though they usually survive, but parsley and even wild hedge parsley in wildflower mixes can be seriously affected. The old gardeners’ solution was to plant strong-smelling plants between the rows (e.g. chives, small onions, garlic or French Marigolds), but this always had mixed success and most people now either put fleece over their seedlings or take advantage of the fact that – at least so we are told – the mothers only fly at less than about two feet above the ground. Certainly, people who surround their carrots with fine screens a couple of feet high, or, even more effectively, grow them in the top of old oil drums, seem to have very considerable success!! There are also on the market some carrot varieties that claim to be resistant.
* In addition, Gooseberry sawflies (see below) occur in most but not all years. The larvae are smallish (usually not more than a centimeter long) whitish grub-like animals, and attack gooseberry bushes usually when the fruit is just starting to form (look for them on the undersides of leaves). A bad infestation can rapidly strip most of the leaves from bushes, though the sawflies don’t harm the fruit and the bushes seem to recover reasonably well the following year. They are most easily removed by hand or by shaking or hosing very hard the bushes, and then picking the grubs off the ground.

(Picture of Gooseberry Sawfly)

Frogs and toads

* We normally host both frogs and toads, which in most years lay eggs in ponds around the site, including the communal area. Unfortunately, after children threw rocks into it some years ago, our communal pond leaks. Unless regularly topped up, this lowers the water level and allows crows and sometimes a heron to feast on the tadpoles. Regular debates at the monthly allotment meeting (see below) have still not come up with a solution to this problem – but it will surely be discussed again!!!

New Zealand Flatworms

* In recent years, earthworms have almost completely disappeared from much of the site – though there have been some signs of possible recovery recently. This is because we have had an invasion of New Zealand flatworms, probably brought in by someone buying a plant in a pot from a nursery or even getting one from someone’s garden elsewhere. The flatworms eat earthworms, and have almost no natural Scottish predators – they ooze a noxious liquid, which deters most things from eating them (though some black beetles, including the Devil’s coach-horse, may be able to deal with them; so please do not kill any beetles that you find on the site, however nasty they may look to be!). The flatworms, which look just like their name and can be up to four inches long and covered in slime, are most often found hiding under slabs or other ground coverings; if you find one please destroy it thoroughly.

But don’t despair!

After a list of ‘problems’ like this, you may be wondering whether we ever grow anything successfully on our site. But we do! Indeed, two of our plot holders have regularly won more prizes than anyone else at the annual Edinburgh allotment show!! So, persevere, and enjoy what you will get! And remember that if you want any advice on anything to do with the allotment, including how to deal with a problem or how best to get something to grow, do ask others – even the longest established plot holders on our site regularly share expertise and experience and learn from each other – so talk to anyone and they will be happy to help!

**Site ‘management’**

City of Edinburgh Council

* On our site, as with most others in the city, plot holders rent their allotments from the City council. The council is responsible for providing the water supply, maintaining the security of the fences and the gate, removal of non-plant waste in the two bins by the gate, for the letting of plots and, on the relatively rare occasions when plot holders don’t keep up their plots adequately (the guideline is that at least 75% of a plot area must be used productively for at least part of the year), for terminating the leases. The council also lays down certain rules as to activities that are not permitted on the site (including prohibition on the keeping of animals, including bees). The details will be in your lease agreement.

The monthly plot holders’ meeting

* The responsibility for making arrangements for more routine activities is devolved to us as a community, and the main medium through which such actions and activities are agreed is through the monthly meetings. Notices encouraging plot holders to attend these meetings are posted by the meetings secretary on the noticeboard by the gate, and emails asking for items for the agenda are circulated in advance by email, followed a few days before the meeting by the agenda itself. After each meeting, a copy of the minutes is posted and circulated by email. **Please note that to get emails you must have given your email address to the meetings secretary, whose email address is posted on the noticeboard by the gate – the Council is no longer allowed to pass email addresses directly to us.**
* The monthly meetings are usually held at the communal hut at 11.00 on the second Saturday of each month between March and September. These meetings are the principal route through which we communicate with the responsible council officer over such matters as gaps in the fencing through which incursions may occur, problems with the water supply, overhanging trees, rats, missed bin collections, etc. They are also the forum where we decide on new initiatives, on the timing of particular events (like the annual barbecue), and on the allocation of funds (see below) for the purchase or repair of collective equipment (e.g. our mower, strimmer, barbecue, and apple press) and on the rules governing their use, on repairs to the communal hut, and on the purchase of plants or other facilities for the communal areas. We also discuss and agree on any advice that we think should be given to plot holders on matters of health and safety or responsible conduct.

**Communal funds**

* The principal source of funds for communal activities is the annual grant that we receive from FEDAGA (the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens). FEDAGA acts as a coordinating body for allotments in the city, defends our interests against proposals from the Council that may be to our collective or individual disadvantage, and supports various initiatives including an annual potato and seed sale at well-discounted prices (watch out for information about these in emails and meeting minutes). To support these, it receives a small sum from the money we each pay to the Council as part of our annual rental; part of this money FEDAGA then passes on to individual allotment sites. Typically, this comes to between about £60 and £150 per year. Rarely, we also receive money from other sources (e.g. when some filming was done on our site a couple of years ago).
* The funds go into the site bank account which is looked after by the treasurer. All expenditure from our bank account has to be approved by a monthly meeting, and it has been now been agreed that no payments will under any circumstances be made by the treasurer without prior approval having been given, and then only if a receipt for the purchase is provided.

**Health and safety and responsible behaviour**

**EMERGENCIES**

* Should it be necessary to call the emergency services, the site address and location references are given at the top of this document, and may be asked for.
* However, there are also less serious situations where one of us may need help, but the person is alone on the plot, or no-one else is immediately around. Examples from the past have been if someone gets locked in without being able to find their key, or someone falls over and is stuck or feels faint and needs a bit of friendly support, or if there is a small fire or other situation which needs more than one person to deal with it, but which is not of a kind which requires the emergency services to be called.
* To help with this kind of situation, a number of us have agreed that our phone numbers be circulated to anyone who wants them. This list can be obtained from the meetings secretary.

Our aim is that the site should be a reasonably safe and secure place for people to enjoy, but we have over the years felt it necessary to remind plot holders of a few issues that could have (and indeed in most cases actually have) caused injury, or damage to plots.

Children

* Children are of course welcome on the site, but please do watch over them carefully. One possible hazard is the various ponds around the site, but if children go unattended onto plots other than your own, they may also trip over netting or stakes or come into contact with poisonous plants or chemicals. There have also been a few cases of children picking fruit from other plots or running over seedbeds or damaging greenhouses or cold frames.

Dogs

* Dogs are welcome on the site, but it is actually a Council rule that they should be kept on leads – certainly, please, don’t allow them to run onto other people’s plots.

Bonfires

* Bonfires have been a source of significant nuisance and also damage in the past. Please only light a bonfire when the wind will not blow smoke into neighbouring houses or disturb the activities of neighbouring plot holders. Above all, please take great care to make sure that your fire is completely extinguished some significant time before you leave the site (there has been at least one fire which the person working on the plot claims to have extinguished, but which subsequently flared up again and did significant damage to five neighbouring plots).

Site security

* Security is in all our interests. Please make sure that you lock the gate whenever you leave, only leaving it unlocked even for short periods if you know that another plot holder is about to enter or leave the site, or if you are in sight of the gate while you unload material from or load it into a vehicle parked by the gate.

Weeds

* Weeds from un-loved parts of neighbouring plots have caused some tensions in recent years. Council rules require us to keep our plots in good order, but inevitably plots can rapidly develop flourishing patches of weeds if a tenant is ill for a while or is about to give up. Taking over such a plot also poses challenges, because many hours of work will be needed to bring it back into full cultivation (on past experience a fairly regular minimum input of 7-8 hours per week in late spring and summer).

* Because many of us faced issues of this kind when we first took over our plots, there is no expectation that every plot will immediately on entry look completely tidy and weed-free. But we do hope that all plot holders in this situation will regularly cut down or pull out any obviously seeding wind-born weeds (e.g. thistles, willowherbs and dandelions) - which it is in their own interests to do in the long run anyway! Also, for everyone, if you have horsetail or horseradish or any other creeping weed on your plot, please feel a responsibility to control it around the edges of your plot; tensions can arise if it starts to spread to others.

Trees and sheds

* Please do not let any trees on your plot grow to a size that casts excessive shade onto neighbouring plots. Also, when putting in a new shed, please try to minimise any shading of other plots, at least without first discussing the matter with your neighbours.

Use of our shared facilities and equipment

* Use of our shared facilities and equipment is encouraged, but if you do use any of these please leave them clean and tidy. The mower and strimmer are kept in the stone shed. They were acquired mainly for trimming the grass on the communal plot (and also the central grass path), and it is hoped that as many of us as possible who are fit to do so will take turns to keep these areas tidy.
* You are, however, welcome to use them on your own plots, but only on suitable areas (not, for example, to use the mower to cut down areas of weeds!). Please always read the instructions and notes carefully – particularly to ensure that only the correct fuel is used. If you use them for your own plot, please put a suitable sum of cash (suggested sum 50 pence) in the tin in the stone shed, as a contribution towards the cost of maintenance, fuel or strim.

Keeping paths clear

* It is very important that paths are kept clear of obstructions including overgrown plants or weeds. The main path alongside the houses must be kept wide enough for a small lorry to deliver sheds or soil to the bottom of the site. The central path must be kept clear at least wide enough for a loaded wheelbarrow or a wheelchair to move along it without contacting vegetation on either side. It is the responsibility of plot holders beside these paths to maintain clearance alongside their plots.

Rubbish

* Rubbish must not be left by the gate. However, if you have any items like pots or good quality wood or tools (or surplus produce) that you think may be of use to someone else, then please, neatly, leave them there with a note saying that they may be taken for free – but if they are still there after two weeks, it is your responsibility to dispose of them.
* Only non-plant material is supposed to be put in the white bins (we are expected here, as elsewhere in the city, to dispose of our own plant waste by composting or by transporting it to the nearby recycling site at Seafield). Also, the Council has issued clear instructions that the bins must not be overfilled, and that any rubbish left beside or on top of them will not be collected.

**Enjoy your allotment and the site facilities**

This is everyone’s site, so enjoy it, chat to other plot holders, come to meetings, and, particularly, do come and bring children to the annual barbecue!!!!