

Disabilities and Allotments



Making Allotments Accessible for people with mental and physical disabilities.

Allotment gardening is a very rewarding pastime and can contribute greatly to the quality of people's lives both mentally and physically. Unfortunately, it is all too common that allotments are not accessible to people with disabilities. Making your allotment accessible to all can change lives for the better.

Firstly, try to ensure that the plots are located near the entrance to the site. A good way to make a plot more accessible is to incorporate raised beds; this is certainly a much more comfortable way to garden for older and less abled people. A good way to make the beds accessible to wheelchairs is to make them like tables, with space underneath. The supports need to be strong and light compost could be used to reduce weight. The advantage being, that wheelchairs or people, who just sit on ordinary chairs as they work, can face the planting area. Part of it can be clear for potting-up etc. Try to use varying heights and widths to suit different needs. You can line the inside of the beds with a polythene liner to help retain moisture and incorporating plenty of well-rotted organic matter will help prevent them from drying out.

Make sure there is a flat hard surface between and around the beds with enough space to make wheelchair access easier. Beds about 4ft wide by 18ft long is a good size to start with, these can be constructed either from block work or railway sleepers with a ledge around the top so gardeners can rest their legs. It is probably best to use new untreated sleepers as old second hand sleepers are treated with chemicals which can be harmful.

Others with disabilities may prefer a normal plot but may prefer to garden with suitable long-handled or light weight tools. Consider incorporating seating areas with tables these are ideal not just for sitting and enjoying a drink and a snack but also make a useful area for sowing seeds and potting on plants.

These plots will also need to have their own water supply preferably from water butts, but a hose pipe would be essential for those who have problems lifting heavy things like watering cans. Also good easy to use composting facilities are essential.

Make sure you have a paved path leading to the plot and if possible site any toilet facilities nearby (these must also be wheelchair friendly) try to consider a composting toilet if possible. Not all people with disabilities will be in a wheelchair, you will have people with impaired sight or hearing, other physical disabilities as well as those with mental health issues. It will be worth inviting some potential gardeners with disabilities down to your site before work begins so they can give you some ideas as

to how they like to garden and the things they would like incorporated into to the design of the plot/s. You may want to encourage groups as well as individuals.

If you don't have materials to hand or people with know-how, creating an accessible plot can be expensive. This type of project would definitely qualify for a grant and there are many organisations that would be willing to fund this type of worthwhile work. (See contacts below) Help and support from other allotment holders is vital and will help people with disabilities adjust to being on the site. Encourage other plot holders to introduce themselves and perhaps ask them if they would be prepared to offer advice and assistance. This is not just relevant to disabled plot holders but to all users of the site. A friendly welcoming atmosphere is crucial to a healthy allotment community and good communication goes along way.

To find out if there are people in your area who may want to take on a plot contact local disability organisations.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Disability Organisations

Thrive

A small national charity that uses gardening to change lives and can put you in touch with 900 local projects around the UK. www.thrive.org.uk

If you have difficulty in doing what you want to in the garden this award-winning website from thrive aims to give you answers so that you can find your way to easier gardening. www.carryongardening.org.uk

DISABILITY RIGHT UK <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/>

Online disability forums and message boards

Ouch! - The BBC's disability website, has message boards for general chat and advice on disability issues. www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbouch

Youreable - A community-based website for disabled people hosting a range of discussion forums on topics including benefits, motoring, health, relationships and equipment. www.youreable.com/

Grant Providers

Big Lottery Fund - Changing Spaces

Fund community groups who want to improve local green spaces such as play areas, community gardens, parks, wildlife areas and village greens, kick-about areas and pathway improvements. www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Lottery Fund - Local Food Grant

Local Food is a £50 million programme that will distribute lottery grants to a variety of food-related projects to help make locally grown food accessible and affordable to local communities. www.localfoodgrants.org

Ecominds

Helps reduce the stigma surrounding mental distress and help create a society that treats people with experience of mental distress fairly, positively, and with respect. www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/index

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