

Fact Sheet

Promote the Plot

Promotional ideas for allotment associations

Although there is a popular renaissance in allotment gardening in the UK, there remains some pockets of vacant plots in many areas. This factsheet can be used to promote one or two plots or an entire site.

A key factor in poor plot uptake is often lack of promotion, although other barriers such as vandalism, poor facilities, and threat (or rumour) of development, also play a part.

Think of your plots and site as a 'product' to sell. A good quality product sells best; for allotments that can mean storage, water, shelter, friendly plottolders or plots that are ready to cultivate.

As well as having a good product, people need to know about it. Promoting your site does not require expensive advertising. The cheapest methods – word of mouth, a mention in the local paper and the odd open day – are often the most effective.

This factsheet looks at these and other ideas.

Good news travels fast

'Word of mouth' is the best way to attract new plottolders – but only if the news is worth spreading. Satisfied plottolders tell their friends and family about their allotment.

Archfields Allotment Association found that, with an energetic new committee and clearance of plots, tenancies doubled quickly. The only form of publicity was "word of mouth", with one man introducing seven friends from the pub!

You could give an incentive – for example, a voucher for the site shop for every new plottolder introduced.

Nurturing new plottolders

- Plot clearance is one of the best promotional methods. Aim to always have a couple of plots rotovated and covered ready for new plottolders. See ARI factsheet *Restore the Plot*.
- Offer a friendly tour of the plots available and their relative merits.
- Ensure efficient and speedy processing of the tenancy agreement.



- A rubbish-free site with good paths is more attractive.
- Well-labelled plots with a choice of different plot sizes. The terms 'small' and 'large' plots are more user-friendly than 'half' and 'full' plots.
- The Beanstalk Project provides a 'tool bank', where ploholders can borrow wheelbarrows etc.
- Set up a buddy system, pairing up experienced ploholders with novices.
- Devise a starter pack with hints on tackling a new plot, lists of useful books, courses and organisations.
- Cambridge Allotment Network found that queries on organic growing are frequent. Garden Organic produce a leaflet 'Starting an Organic Allotment' and the website is a great resource: www.gardenorganic.org.uk.
- Produce a newsletter and/or noticeboard to keep ploholders up to date with new developments and special offers.



Attracting ploholders is often not as hard as keeping them, with many councils reporting high dropout rates in year one and two.

- In Stockport novices are only allowed a half plot, graduating to full plots when they have stood the test of time. But be flexible; an experienced or newly retired gardener may want - and cope with - a whole plot.
- In Leeds ploholders are given a reduction in plot rent in their second year, not their first, as this is when an incentive is most needed. Never offer ploholders free plots in the first year, as they will not take their new responsibilities seriously.

First impressions count

Prospective ploholders will give up if greeted by a locked gate and no clues on renting a plot. A gate open at specified times, a notice board, flowerbeds instead of rubbish and a helpful response on entering the site creates a better impression.

Put a noticeboard next to the gate with essential information on it in big letters:

- name of the site and who to contact
- plot size(s), price and availability.

Some sites have a second noticeboard inside with additional information:

- forthcoming events
- names and plot numbers of committee members
- map of site
- bonfire restrictions, rent due date etc
- topical gardening tips.

Noticeboard design tips:

- metal signs with vinyl lettering are more weather-resistant than painted wood.
- consider a lockable clear cover.
- laminate notices for any outdoor use to prevent wrinkling.
- if noticeboards get vandalised, opt for a cheap, simple format that can be replaced as soon as it is damaged to prevent advertising vandalism!

Consider having information on noticeboards translated into other community languages.

Planning a promotional drive

People are bombarded by information so they ignore a lot of it. Be strategic with your publicity.

Leaflet drops have variable success but are worth trying once. Give each plotholder a batch to leaflet their neighbouring streets.

Ask any **fully tenanted sites** if they could publicise your site to people on their waiting list.

Community newsletters, parish magazines and free newspapers often carry a list of local groups and are widely read, especially by older people. Make sure that your site is in there and submit occasional articles.

Posters displayed by local shopkeepers, community centres or GP surgeries get more attention than 'fly' posters. Postcard-sized adverts in shop windows are cheap and effective.

Run a **poster colouring or design competition**, asking the children who take part to stick the poster in their front windows.

Commercial advertising of any kind is expensive and nearly always ineffective.

Stalls at local events or presentations to local organisations are effective because they allow you to talk directly to people. Check your local paper for school fairs, gardening shows or other events and visit your library or voluntary resource centre for a list of local groups. A pasting table with leaflets and some seasonal vegetables is a good start, maybe a board with some photos of your allotments and a map. Try an interactive game like 'guess the number of seeds in the pumpkin.'

Local groups that may be interested in allotments include Local Exchange Trading Schemes, Scouts, Brownies, Woodcraft Folk, MIND, Age Concern, religious groups, social clubs, youth groups/centres and ethnic minority community



Council staff dressed up as giant vegetables to promote allotments in Newcastle upon Tyne

groups/centres. Your local authority may be able to help with translating information into other languages. See ARI factsheet *Project Allotment*.

It is also worth publicising allotments to **agencies offering community services**, as gardening can carry multiple benefits for their clients. The service provider will provide the support and supervision for their client group when at the allotments. Contact your local authority (community or social services) for details of Surestart (preschool initiative), and support services for people with disability needs, single parents, and homeless people. Contact your Primary Care Trust for healthy living initiatives like 'Five a Day'.

Farmers markets are an excellent way of promoting allotments, as well as selling surplus plants and produce. Cambridge Allotment Network find that their giant map of allotment sites attracts many people to their stall.

Think up some imaginative **publicity stunts**. In Bromley the federation recreate an entire plot in the Glades Shopping Centre each spring. At the Newcastle Gardening Show, people wore carrot costumes to hand out leaflets.

Increase **community involvement** by inviting the local school for an educational visit or offering produce for a harvest festival.

Bristol City Council find that it is a good idea to get some **plots cleared and ready to cultivate** *before* a promotional campaign, to encourage the new people you attract.

Always ask enquirers how they heard of your site and what inspired them to look for a plot to help you plan future publicity drives.

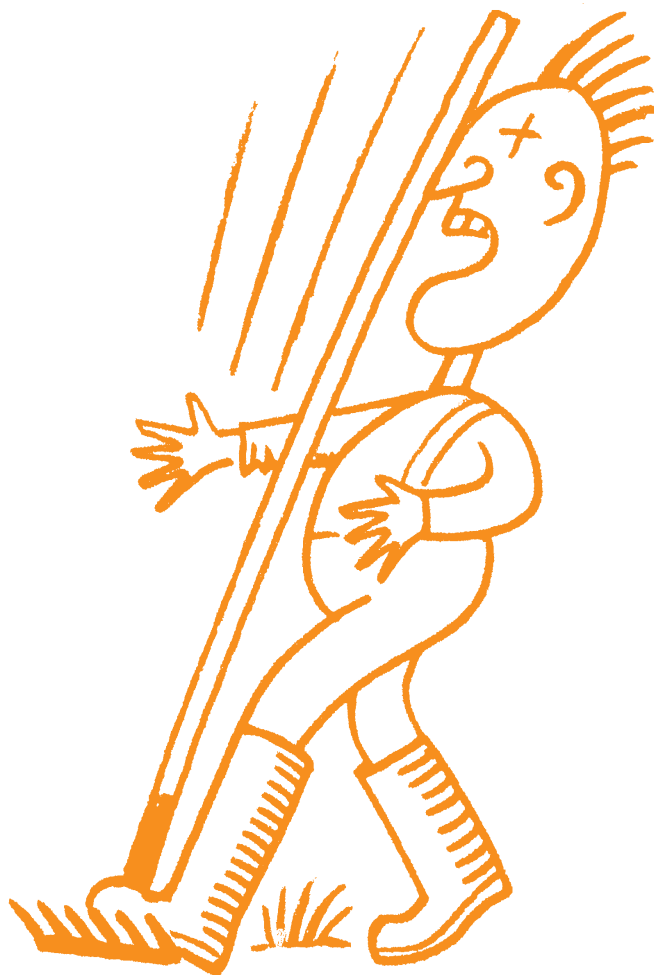
When to run your promotional campaign

As the weather warms up, people descend on the garden centre and attack the garden - an ideal time to promote the plot. However, good gardeners know that it is better to take on a new plot earlier in the season, so don't rule out promotion in autumn or winter.

Getting even more strategic

Think who to target, where and how. Plan different approaches for workers looking for a new hobby, unhealthy people needing to take more exercise or families wanting to do more together.

Garden owners are just as likely to get an allotment as flat dwellers - their garden may be too small or needed by the family. Flat dwellers may need more gardening advice and the freedom to create a garden plot.



Open Days

These are a good way to attract new plotholders and boost funds through plant and produce sales. Here are some planning tips to help make your day a success:

- Biggest vegetable competitions are much loved. Tasting trials are popular too.
- Publicise your event widely, putting up posters and contacting the radio and local papers.
- Provide lots of shelter using gazebos or attaching a tarpaulin between trees.
- Spring is a good time for sales of bedding plants and seedlings and giving tours of plots that are ready to be taken on. Late summer is better for 'best plot' and other competitions; plots look at their best and there is lots of produce.
- Entertainment in the form of music, craft demonstrations and children's activities will add to the fun. Some entertainers may be happy to take produce and plants as payment, or pass a hat around.

- Obviously friends and family are the best source of ideas for entertainers. Otherwise try contacting school choirs and local bands.
- Craftspeople may be happy to demonstrate if they are able to sell their crafts. Pole lathes (wood turning) and wool spinning are especially popular. Find contacts of craftworkers through local craft guilds, woodland centres, craft markets and gift shops.
- For children's activities try local youth groups, party organisers, Scrapstore and community centres. There are also some good books on face painting, willow and nature crafts: perhaps someone in your group could run the children's area. To avoid any problems, put a notice up stating that only children accompanied by a parent can take part.
- Refreshments, usually in the form of cakes and hot drinks, are a good idea. If

you have no building, a marquee is best, although you could just about run it under two gazebos with some trestle tables and a gas bottle operated tea urn or hobs. The Womens Institute may be able to help.

- Remember to inform your local authority, including the environmental health department, of your event well in advance. Check your insurance too – are you covered via your own or local authority's policy for public liability at an event? See ARI pack *Health and Safety on Allotments: A management guide*.

Tips on publicity material

Appearance

- Good quality publicity material is not hard to produce with modern computer software. A library or IT centre may run computer courses.

Grow your own fruit and vegetables

Allotments to Let

🌱 enjoy really fresh produce all year round
 🌱 know what you're eating
 🌱 get some healthy and productive exercise



Trumpington Allotment Society
 01223 563856
 01223 840428
 trumpington@allotments.net

Recipe for a good poster

- **Minimal** information but **covering the 5 W's**:
 - ✓ **who**
 - ✓ **what**
 - ✓ **why**
 - ✓ **when**
- and
- ✓ **where**
- **Attention-grabbing** statement or question works well for poster heading.
- Big letters in a **clear**, non-fussy font.

- People are more likely to read your material if it looks attractive. Use simple cartoons or drawings rather than photocopied photos. The drawings in this factsheet can be freely reproduced; please credit artist Bob Gale. All drawings will photocopy clearly or can be obtained as a computer file (by email or on CD) from the ARI office.
- Photocopying is a lot cheaper than colour printing and just as effective if coloured paper is used.
- Use colours with a strong contrast to ensure ease of reading for all.
- Fluorescent can look aggressive.
- Use clear fonts (text style), with a size of at least 12 point for flyers and leaflets.
- When writing the text, think of the questions enquirers and new plotholders most commonly ask, then answer these in the text.

Production

- Consider using 100% recycled or "from post consumer waste" paper.
- Shop around for a printing shop offering cheap deals on large print-runs. Ask to see test copies from your originals before the print-run, to check quality.
- Produce your originals on a good quality inkjet or laser printer, then photocopy from the original. Avoid using inkjet copies for the final publicity material (unless laminating) as the ink will run if used outdoors.
- See if your council will help you to produce the leaflet or provide free photocopying.

- It is easy to under-estimate the time taken to produce a leaflet and distribute it. For a timed (seasonal) publicity drive, allow lots of time (8+ weeks).



Flyers are usually handed to people who are not familiar with your organisation and should be brief (as few as 50-100 words). A6 (1/4 piece of A4 paper) or bookmark size work well, any smaller gets lost.

Leaflets are displayed on stalls, in libraries, or other situations where people make the choice to pick up and read information. A few hundred words can be included but make information more readable by using columns, boxes and images. A5 (1/2 piece of A4 paper) works well.

Car 'stickers' can be cheaply produced on paper (the length of an A4 sheet, divided into 2 or 3 sections) and circulated to all plot holders (and their families), with blobs of Blu Tak™ supplied. Use a chunky, bold font.

Posters that will be placed outside or on display for a long time should be laminated so they don't get tatty. Shop laminating is expensive. Buying your own laminator may be cheaper in the long run.

A banner saying 'plots available here' was produced by Bristol City Council and placed on a site, visible from a nearby road or houses. One site became full within a day of putting the banner up. The banner can be moved from site to site, according to uptake and availability of cleared plots.

Websites are especially effective for promoting allotments across a whole city or area. Keep it simple and up to date.

Tips on media work

- Your local paper wants a story. It is not enough that you have plots to rent (though a bit more newsworthy if you have just cleared some plots). Dress it up with a topical photo opportunity; biggest leek ever just harvested, youngest (or first Croatian) plotholder ever just taken a plot; first strawberry
- of the year just picked; birthday of oldest plotholder next week. Tell your local paper about it, invite them along and tell them that you have plots to rent and how to get one.
- Alternatively tie stories into seasonal, local or national events like harvest festival or National Allotments Week™.
- Do not pull people into the limelight without asking them first.
- Remember you have no control over what the journalist does with your story.
- Study the publication to get an idea of which journalist to target. The events, 'news in briefs', community or feature sections are good places to try.
- News should be new (or made to sound new).
- Get your story across to the journalist in the first two minutes, with a clear message.
- Appoint a member of your group as publicity officer. They will get to know the press and what works well.
- If you can't get a story published try writing a letter to be published in the letters page telling people you have plots to rent and what the benefits of having an allotment are.



Our vision is to
increase allotment
uptake by individuals
and groups

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Please feel
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Bad photo - Good photo:

Close ups often work better than shots of whole allotments



Tips on photographs

Plain shots of allotment plots can be dull. Take close-ups of ripe vegetables or close-up action shots of people gardening on their allotments. Obtain written permission from parents before using photos of children.

Resources

Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI)

Supports and develops allotments regeneration and the creation of brand new allotment sites in the UK.

www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

ari@farmgarden.org.uk

Tel. (0117) 963 1551

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG)

Supports, represents and promotes community-managed farms and gardens across the UK.

www.farmgarden.org.uk

admin@farmgarden.org.uk

Tel. (0117) 923 1800

Garden Organic (formerly HDRA)

Organic gardening.

Tel. (0247) 630 3517

enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk

www.gardenorganic.org.uk

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG)

The national representative body for the allotment movement in the UK.

www.nsalg.org.uk

natsoc@nsalg.org.uk

Tel. (01536) 266 576

Thrive

Network of physical and mental health projects inc. 200 on allotments.

Publications include building raised beds, designing gardens for special needs.

Tel. (0118) 988 5688

info@thrive.org.uk

www.thrive.org.uk

www.carryongardening.org.uk

Friends of the Earth

Fact sheets for local groups on gaining publicity include 'how to write a killer press release' and 'how to raise your profile'. Look on their website for the how-to series under general campaigning resources.

www.foe.co.uk

Local Government Association

Growing in the Community – A Good Practice Guide for the Management of Allotments' (2nd Edition) contains exemplars of good practice in allotments regeneration. Discounted rate for allotment associations.

Tel. (020) 7664 3131

www.lga.gov.uk

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