

Elm Road Allotments Association - Using Water from the Taps and Tanks

Through our annual rent we all pay collectively for the water that we use from the taps and tanks on the site. Our water is metered and the bill runs to thousands of pounds a year – it makes up half of our total expenditure. So it is the responsibility of each of us to do what we can to use as little water as possible and use the water we take from the tap wisely.

For crops outdoors most of their water needs come from natural rainfall and in some years no watering is necessary. But as we know there can sometimes be weeks of drought, when there is no rainfall, and this is when additional watering is needed to keep crops growing. So we need to make sensible decisions about when to water and how much water to use.

In many allotment sites around the UK hose pipes are not allowed, but here at Elm Road hand-held hoses are fine as long as the valuable water is not being wasted or taken in excessive quantities*. It is also perfectly acceptable at Elm Road to grow some indoor crops in small allotment greenhouses watered by hand.

Responsible and intelligent use of water is something we should all take an interest in and detailed guidance is published by national gardening charities the Royal Horticultural Society and the National Association of Allotments. [links below]

WATER USE DO'S – ELM ROAD ALLOTMENTS

Do: collect rainwater in butts and barrels

Do: remove as many weeds as possible as they take water away from crops

Do: add plenty of organic matter to the soil; manure, compost and green manures are all good

Do: use surface mulches, which allow water in, to prevent water loss

Do: keep your soil open to the rain and the surface of the soil loose to help rain soak in

Do: water-in young plants well when you first plant them out

If you do decide to water due to a period of lack of rain please follow this guidance:

- Once a week or every 10 days is enough
- Early in the morning or late in the evening are the proper times
- Apply the water in a gentle jet to the base of the plants where they need it
- The correct amount to apply (as a guide) is around 20 litres per square metre.

WATER USE DON'TS – ELM ROAD ALLOTMENTS

Don't: water in the hot sun, it will evaporate immediately, don't use sprinklers

Don't: waste valuable water flooding the ground to soften it

Don't: keep the surface of the soil wet at all times, this encourages also slugs

Don't: grow plants in large rain-excluding areas such as polytunnels and greenhouse structures

Don't: grow lots of plants in containers which have to be watered all the time

Don't: cover the ground with plastic sheeting to exclude the winter rains

Don't: waste valuable water washing down items such as decking

*Elm Road Allotments – High Water Use Plots

If, in the opinion of the committee, plot holders are using excessive water for example by using extensive indoor growing areas, growing lots of plants in containers, using cultivation methods involving keeping the ground wet at all times or choosing to grow plants which require large amounts of water then as from October 2017 onwards the committee will be adding a “high water use” surcharge to the annual rent of these plots.

Website Links

RHS guidance on watering

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/Advice/Profile?PID=312>

National Allotment Society advice on gardening in drought

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/growing-advice/gardening-advice/gardening-in-drought/>