Dunchurch Allotment Association Environment Policy - Updated April 2022

Principles

These guidelines aim to:

- Promote actions that make the allotment site and the wider environment more sustainable and enhance the natural environment.
- Avoid practices that damage and degrade the site, the wider environment and its users.

***With the exception of the ban on carpet use from April 2022**, the guidelines are a voluntary code of practice and recognise that the level of commitment is dependent on personal circumstances and choice.*

Ground cover /mulch for weed clearance and control

- Best practice – use recycled plant material from allotment, cardboard, newspaper, commercially produced loose mulches, wood chips.
- Acceptable – use biodegradable mulch fabric, inert material such as gravel, permeable and non-permeable synthetic material such as polythene sheet.
- Practice disallowed on allotment site – using carpet as a mulch. This is because:
  - Harmful chemicals, such as organotins, permethrin and brominated flame retardant[1], will leach into soil;
  - Weeds will grow through the carpet as it weathers and rots and it will fall apart as soon as you try to pull it up, leaving fibres and stringy nylon in the soil, which causes problems to gardeners and wildlife alike. [2,3]

Microplastics in soil

- Avoid using plastics that break down into small fragments. Although plastics don't rot away like organic materials, they do physically break into smaller pieces with exposure to light and weathering. These secondary microplastics – fragments that have broken down from larger objects – can be harmful in soil environments. Research has already shown that microplastics are ingested by earthworms causing them to lose weight, and reducing their biological fitness and lifespan. [4,5,6]

Chemical use and disposal

Chemicals – products such as fertilizers, wood preservatives, pesticides and weed killers – are toxic substances. These need to be used correctly and can be dangerous to humans, pets and plants.[7]

- Check the product will control your problem before purchase.
- Avoid buying more than you will use in a year.
- Always keep chemicals in their original containers.
- Store chemicals in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight.
- Keep chemicals out of reach of children and pets.
- Never dispose of surplus pesticide or weed killer down drains or in watercourses. [8,9]

Waste material and bonfires

Bonfires are one way of getting rid of unwanted material – however they are air polluting and can be a nuisance to neighbours and residents.

To get rid of organic material:

- Best practice – compost green/ partially woody material.
- Pernicious weeds can be bagged up and left to rot for several years.
- Material infected by soil-borne disease should be burned. [9,10]
- Avoid burning plastic, household waste and compostable waste.
- Burn dry material when the wind will not affect neighbours and traffic .

Water use

Mains water is a precious resource and excessive use should be avoided.

- Collect rainwater from building roofs and in water butts where possible.
- Maximise water holding capacity of soils by incorporating organic matter and mulching.
- Water plants in the early morning and late evening. [11,12]

Biodiversity

It is good practice to increase biodiversity on the allotment and to avoid practices which reduce it.

To increase biodiversity:

- Use bird and bat boxes, bug hotels.[13,14]
- Where appropriate, grow pollen rich and indigenous wild flowers, shrubs and trees to support pollinators and insect diversity.[15]

Practices to avoid:

- Avoid the use of pesticides which do not discriminate between beneficial creatures and damaging pests. [16]
- Where possible, avoid the use of peat in growing media. [17, 18]

References

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