Marcham Parish Council

Bonfires – Allotment Rules and Guidance for Tenants

Please follow our rules and guidelines in relation to bonfires on Cow Lane Allotments, which will avoid tenancy termination, environmental harm, possible wildfires and will maintain good relations with residents. The rules set out below will be incorporated into your tenancy agreement.

There is no national ban on bonfires on allotments. There are a layered set of rules, including rules in your tenancy agreement and the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Smoke that drifts onto neighbouring property for more than a few minutes is a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and smoke drifting over a road is an offence under the Highway Act 1980.

The standard UK allotment burn window is October to March. Outside this period, burning is usually prohibited because of dry conditions, wildfires risk, and people using gardens. October to March covers the wet, colder months when smoke disperses faster and most gardens are not in active use.

Site rules in your tenancy agreement come first, bonfires are only permitted:

- for allotment material that cannot be composted,
- between **October to March** on the:
    - **first Monday and last Thursday in each month, between1600–2000** (the wind drops at dusk, the smoke disperses upwards in cooler air, and most neighbours have finished outdoor activities. Daytime burning generates more complaints)
    - **first Saturday in each month between 0800-1200**
- if they burn out within 45-minutes of lighting,
- if it is **Not** a still evening and the wind is blowing away from adjacent properties
- if there are **Not** drought conditions or if the Parish Council have instructed tenants not to light bonfires, and
- with a responsible adult tending the fire.

Tenants:

- **must never use** petrol, paraffin, or other accelerants to start the fire (they produce unburnt vapour and black smoke).
- please check there is no wildlife in the bonfire before lighting.

What you can and cannot burn:

- burn only dry, woody, plot-grown waste, which is the universal rule across UK. Specifically permitted: dead branches over 25mm thick, woody hedge cuttings, sweetcorn stalks (dried), bean haulm, brassica stumps after composting attempt, raspberry canes, woody perennial top growth.
- do not burn green or wet material. Fresh leaves, grass clippings, soft prunings, and recently cut hedge produce dense smoke and smouldering fires. Stack the material undercover for 4-6 weeks until it dries or compost it.
- do not burn diseased material at low temperatures. Club-root, honey fungus, and brassica viruses survive temperatures under 60C. A smouldering bonfire can spread spores.

- never burn plastic, treated wood, painted wood, tyres, or carpet. All produce toxic smoke and are illegal. Plastic plant labels, twine, polythene mulch sheeting, and old fleece produce toxic dioxins.
- burning waste from outside the plot is illegal under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 section 33.
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Summary guidance:

Material	Burn?	Reason
Dead branches over 25mm	**Yes**	Burns hot, low smoke
Woody prunings	**Yes**	If dry, low smoke
Brassica stumps	**Yes**	Otherwise compost
Diseased plant material	**Yes**	Burning is the safe disposal
Green leaves and grass	**No**	Smouldering, dense smoke
Treated or painted wood	**No**	Toxic fumes, illegal
Plastic, fleece, polythene	**No**	Toxic dioxins, illegal
Off-plot waste	**No**	Illegal waste disposal

Alternatives to burning

Most plot waste does not need burning:

1. hot composting. A hot heap reaches 60-70C in the centre and breaks down most plot waste in 8-12 weeks. The heap needs to be at least 1 cubic metre, layered with brown (woody) and green (leafy) material, turned every 2 weeks. Brassica stumps need crushing first. Hot composting kills weed seeds and most pathogens.
2. council green waste collection.
3. Hugel beds. A Hugel bed is a raised bed built over a buried core of woody pruning's. Dig a trench 50cm deep, fill with branches, top with topsoil and compost. The wood breaks down over 2-3 years releasing slow nutrients into the bed above. Useful for larger pruning's that would otherwise go on the bonfire, and
4. the Allotment Working Group plans to establish a central compost facility for green waste.

The Allotment Working Group recommends:

- the Council formally notifies all tenants that bonfires are not permitted on their allotment plots until further notice due to the risk of wildfires, and
- the Council considers and approves the rules and guidance as set out above (but does not send these to tenants until the autumn, with other information in relation to the Allotment Working Group's draft plan, and
- changes to tenancy agreements are made as part of a general update in the autumn.