

Axminster Allotment Guide to Cultivation Expectations

Definition of “Cultivation” on an Allotment Plot

Cultivation means the active and ongoing management of an allotment plot to grow crops, maintain soil health, and control weeds. A plot is considered *under cultivation* when the plotholder is making regular, visible efforts to prepare, plant, maintain, or improve the land for the purpose of producing food or flowers.

Cultivation does **not** require the plot to be fully planted at all times, but it does require clear, sustained activity across the majority of the plot.

What Cultivation Looks Like Throughout the Year.

During the Growing Season (approx. March–October)

Typical signs of cultivation could include a combination of any of these:

- A majority of the plot is planted with vegetables, fruit, or flowers
- Seed beds prepared and maintained
- Regular weeding and removal of spent crops
- Staked, tied, or supported plants
- Watering, mulching, feeding, and general crop care
- Managed composting areas
- Paths kept tidy
- Grass areas mown, edges and hedges kept neat
- Trees kept below the permitted height
- The plot and its structures are kept in good condition and are tidy and safe.

Please note that undertaking just one of these activities alone would not constitute active cultivation.

Signs of Cultivation in the Winter Months (approx. November – February)

Winter is a quieter period, but there should still be **evidence of care and preparation**. Signs you are tending your plot include:

1. Overwintering and Caring for Crops

- Winter brassicas (kale, sprouts, cabbage)
- Leeks, parsnips, Jerusalem artichokes
- Garlic, onions, and shallots are planted in autumn
- Broad beans sown in late autumn
- Pruning fruit trees

These show active use of the growing space.

2. Soil Preparation and Protection

- Beds dug over or “no-dig” beds refreshed with compost/mulch
- Organic matter spread over beds for winter breakdown
- Soil covered (e.g., with cardboard, compost, weed membrane) to suppress weeds
- Building of raised beds for the following season

This shows you are preparing for spring.

3. A Tidy and Maintained Plot

- Paths kept reasonably clear
- Edges and grassed areas kept short.
- Trees and hedges are cut back outside of bird nesting season.
- Structures (frames, canes, netting, sheds) are maintained and repaired rather than collapsing or rotting
- Compost heaps turned or added to
- Rubbish is removed rather than accumulating
- Tools and equipment stored or tidied away

Even without crops, the plot should appear clearly organised, and not abandoned.

4. Weed Control

- Major weeds (brambles, docks, nettles, thistles, couch grass) kept in check
- Beds not overwhelmed by weed growth, showing months of neglect
- Grassed areas kept short.

Some winter weeds will always appear, but they shouldn't dominate the plot.

When a Plot Might Be Considered Uncultivated

Especially in winter, a plot may be at risk of being marked **uncultivated** if:

- The entire plot is overgrown with weeds or grass
- No overwintering crops, soil preparation, or coverings are present
- No visible work has taken place for several months
- Structures are collapsing or unused
- The plot looks abandoned, with rubbish or detritus accumulating upon it.

Please be aware that if we write to you about a lack of cultivation on your plot, it is probably because we have been monitoring it for quite some time, the condition of the plot is such that it evidently has not been maintained for a while OR because we have received complaints about it.

How Much of My Plot Should Be Actively Cultivated?

We understand that taking on an allotment is a big commitment, and it can be both challenging and expensive to get your plot up and running. However, we do expect plotholders to visit their plot weekly at the very least, and to demonstrate dedication to keeping their allotment in good order, ensuring the site remains enjoyable and well used by all.

That said, we do not expect you to be cultivating your entire plot from day one. Our expectations for plot cultivation for new and existing tenants are as follows:

- Within the first 6 months of the start of the tenancy, 50% of the total area of the plot must be either cultivated or suitably prepared for cultivation.
- Within the first 12 months of the start of the tenancy, 75% of the total area of the plot is cultivated or prepared for cultivation.

If you are considering taking on an allotment plot, please bear these expectations in mind, to ensure you don't take on a plot which is too large for you and the time you have available.

A note on keeping chickens. Whilst the keeping of chickens is not considered "cultivation" in the traditional sense, we do include the space occupied by chicken keeping in the above percentages. However, please be aware that chickens cannot occupy any more than 50% of an allotment plot.

You can find out more about the "Do's and Don't's" of tenancing an allotment with Axminster Town Council from our 'Allotment Rules & Regulations', which can be found on our website, along with lots of other useful information that may help you get started. Alternatively, you can request a copy of this document from the Town Council office.