

Animals on allotments

The Law

Prior to the 1950 Allotments Act, the keeping of hens and rabbits on allotments was prohibited by law. The Act abolished this restriction:

'Abolition of contractual restrictions on keeping hens and rabbits.'

(1) Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in any lease or tenancy or in any covenant, contract or undertaking relating to the use to be made of any land, it shall be lawful for the occupier of any land to keep, otherwise than by way of trade or business, hens or rabbits in any place on the land and to erect or place and maintain such buildings or structures on the land as reasonably necessary for that purpose:

Provided that nothing in this subsection shall authorise any hens or rabbits to be kept in such a place or in such a manner as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance or affect the operation of any enactment.'



This doesn't mean allotment holders have a right to keep animals, just that it's not restricted by law. The keeping of any livestock is subject to the landlord's permission and should be included in the tenancy agreement.

Hens and bees

Hens and bees are beneficial livestock to keep on allotments or community growing sites. Hens are fantastic gardeners, it's part of their nature to scratch for insects and grubs in the soil. This tendency can be put to good use as they can clear areas of land or be put on beds after a crop has been harvested. They will clear crop residues and fertilise the soil with one of the best manures available. A hive of bees on site will increase biodiversity and ensure that all produce and tree blossom is pollinated.

As with all livestock, both hens and bees require proper husbandry to ensure they stay in good health.

- For hens, it's important to offer them; protection from predators, a good supply of feed and grit for egg production and a well-designed chicken coop. You should also consider Welsh Government regulations, animal welfare, storing the feed, rodents, site security and the effect your animals will have on other plot holders.
- With bees you need to consider; the number of hives to keep, when to do maintenance, checking for pests, and the position of the hives from a safety point of view. You must check whether any plot holders have a severe allergy. You should become part of your local bee keeping association either directly or through the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) the national organisation for beekeepers. Your local association will be able to provide advice, give bee keeping demonstrations, and advise on/sell you equipment, bees and insurance.

Welfare

It is important to note that animals must not be kept on allotments unless they can be provided with appropriate levels of care and a suitable environment. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal and details the duty of care towards animals. This means that anyone responsible for an animal, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, must take reasonable steps to make sure the animal's needs are met. This includes providing:

- a suitable diet
- a suitable environment
- the chance to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- a place to be housed with or apart from other animals
- protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

It is recommended that plot holders who keep animals should make a plan to prevent/deal with:

- fire
- flood
- outbreak of disease
- end of tenancy

Contact details should also be displayed permanently in a prominent position in case of emergency.

Welsh Government:

www.gov.wales/animal-welfare

Further reading

- NSALG leaflet – Keeping hens and rabbits on allotments
www.nsalg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/A5_Hens_rabbits_220213_HiRes.pdf
- The Welsh Beekeepers Association and the National Bee Unit provide a wide range of beekeeping information
www.wbka.com/ and www.nationalbeeunit.com/
- British Hen Welfare Trust
www.bhwt.org.uk/
- Animal Welfare Act 2006
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents
- Laying Hen Welfare (code of practice)
www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-01/laying-hen-welfare-code-of-practice.pdf