

Guidelines for Members on Bonfires

1. Consider whether you really need a bonfire - is there an alternative ,more environmentally friendly option to dispose of your organic waste?
2. Only burn brown, dry organic waste.
3. Choose a time and place which will not disturb your neighbouring plot holders.
4. Do not have a fire when the wind direction will blow smoke over neighbouring houses on Elfleda Rd and Whitehill Rd.
5. Reduce smoke by burning small amounts at a time, so that the fire burns brightly.
6. NEVER leave your fire unattended.
7. Ensure the fire is fully extinguished before leaving.

More detailed guidance and advice about having a bonfire

Having That Bonfire!

You are allowed to have bonfires but we might want to have a prior think about the procedure. Those who have occupied a plot for twenty years may well ignore the following tips, citing prior experience but there are plenty of newbies on the allotment who may not have much experience with fires—either on or off the allotment.

The following is a set of practical tips; they are not rules!

1. Do You Really Want One?

- If you have a car – or live adjacent to the allotment—take waste home and put in your own green bin which, in many parts of Cambridge, tend to be somewhat larger.
- If you have a car, make an appointment at the Milton recycling centre, and dump your waste there.

- Try to think of any of the above options as multiple 'small' operations' rather than as 'gigantic' one-offs.
- And finally – composting. Recycle components of your green waste back into the soil.

2. Choosing Time and Place

- Some allotments specify rigid daily (as well as monthly) timeframes for fires, yet one could argue that that merely creates an inflexible calendar where the vagaries of weather are not factored in.
- Consider where your plot sits in relationship to external entities. The smaller plots on the entry road in particular back on to residential properties. On certain days of the year the Cambridge United football arena presents us with a large population.
- Try to be aware of the rhythms of your closer plot neighbours. Are there regular patterns of absence that you can exploit? Talk to your neighbours as a sign of respect and discuss proposed bonfires.
- Don't disrespect the weather! If the wind is too strong and/or in the wrong direction, leave your fire for another time. If you are not sure, don't do it!

3. Choosing the Content

- It is important to specify one particular material that is considered unsuitable for plot bonfires. Rotten wood timbers from fallen fences, decrepit sheds and rotten pallets should never be put on a plot bonfire. A wood fire has a different dynamic and is much harder to predict and control. Such timber should be removed from the allotment in periodic skips or, alternatively, provide the primary material for a scheduled communal bonfire
- One gardening guru has considered that any well-developed allotment plot only needs one modest bonfire a year. That assumes an identical condition on all plots that rarely exists in practice. A quick glance at prospective bonfire piles around that allotment tends to identify material that would take a very long time to compost, primarily the woody stocks and roots of things like sweetcorn and various brassicas combined with the trimmings from fruit bushes. That material, indeed anything destined for a bonfire, always benefits from being chopped into small components as soon as possible. The material dries quicker and is easier to control in a fire.
- If you think of a fire as a surgical tool rather than a bludgeon, then consider that several small fires might always be preferable to one large fire, and will certainly be easier to control and extinguish where external conditions change suddenly.

4. Doing the Deed

- If you are burning a smaller amount derived from a larger pile, make sure that your fire is at some distance from that larger repository. Otherwise you run the danger that the fire jumps to that larger repository – and out of your control.

- NEVER use petrol derivatives as an initial accelerant. Try inserting balled-up newspaper sheets in your combustibles.
- Assemble some watering cans with water both for an emergency and to wet down the area at the end of the operation. There is a school of thought that suggest that watering a fire creates a supercharged heated area below the surface of that fire but that is almost certainly irrelevant with small fires.
- It is always a good idea to finally rake the site of the fire to dissipate—and identify—any smouldering remains.
- You may also elect to scatter a few shovels of dirt over the fire location.
- As the rules specifically state, never depart your plot where a fire is still discernibly active.