

Gardening Associations How to Form and Run Them by



**National Society of
Allotment & Leisure
Gardeners Limited**

Benefits of Gardening

The right use of leisure is said to be one of the greatest problems of modern times. If by that is meant the use of leisure hours in the most profitable way, both for oneself and the community, then gardening ranks very high, giving as it does bodily health, mental relaxation and a good return for the money and energy expended, as well as being an abounding source of interest. The cumulative effect of this is to make life more tolerable for a great number of people whose opportunities for health giving activities and pleasures are extremely limited.

Benefits of Forming a Gardening Association

The benefits of starting a gardening association are many, but the most important aspect perhaps being that it is possible thereby to instil the community spirit that enhances the whole neighbourhood. Gardening certainly takes no account of class, creed or race, beyond extending a helping hand to those of its members who may meet with misfortune. Indeed, the pivot upon which the Gardening Movement works is co-operation.

Membership of a gardening association is functional and continuous. It is possible to save a good deal of expense in obtaining seeds and other horticultural products for members at economic terms, for associations doing mutual trading with their members are not liable to tax on profits, but may be taxed on investment income.

Essentials for Forming an Association

Two things are necessary for the formation of a successful gardening association. Firstly, enthusiasm and secondly, good spade work.

The enthusiasm usually comes from a person or several persons who are inspired by the possibilities of the formation of an Association. They gather others around them and together they begin the spade work of interesting others in their idea.

The first question that confronts the person, or the few interested people concerned, is how to interest others. Word of mouth, leaflets, advertisements in a local newspaper or by exhibiting posters. But the obvious solution is to call a meeting to discuss the matter. By Section 35 of the Small Holdings and Allotment Act of 1908 a school room may be provided for this purpose.

The Initial Meeting

A popular Chairperson should be procured and be well informed beforehand of the objects of the meeting and what is hoped will be the outcome.

Agreement being reached to form an Association, a Chairperson, a Secretary and a Treasurer should be elected by the meeting. A provisional Committee should also be elected. By appointing the Committee as a provisional body, it enables people who are willing to work to get the Association going, and afterwards wish to retire, to do so. (An item on the Agenda at the first Ordinary General Meeting after the Formation Meeting should be the election of a Committee for the ensuing twelve months).

Model Rules Guidelines for Unregistered Associations

Rules should be simple and to the point and may be based on the following Model Rules:

- 1. NAME** The name of the association shall be
- 2. OBJECTS** The objects of the association shall be:
 - (i) To promote the interests of all members in the gardening activities and to take joint action for the benefits of members.
 - (ii) To conduct negotiations with the local authority and private landlords for the use of gardening land.
 - (iii) To take action to protect members against damage, trespass and theft.
 - (iv) To obtain a supply of seeds, fertilizers, tools and other horticultural equipment on behalf of members.
 - (v) Arranging lectures, film shows, demonstrations, competitions and other social events.
 - (vi) Co-operating with other gardening associations and environmental organisations in matters of mutual interest.
- 3. Membership.** The Association shall consist of such persons whose applications for membership are approved by the Committee.
- 4. Subscription.** Every member shall pay on entry into the Association an annual subscription of ... renewable on in each year (see note).
- 5. Arrears.** Any member who is one month in arrears with his subscription shall be held to have ceased to be a member, unless explanation in writing is given to the Committee of extenuating circumstances.
- 6. Officers.** The Officers of the Association shall be a Chairperson, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and, if desired, a President. They shall be elected at each Annual General Meeting. Retiring Officers shall be eligible for re-election. They shall be ex-officio members of the Committee.
- 7. Committee.** The affairs of the Association shall be conducted by a Committee of Management of not less than members. The Committee shall retire at the Annual General Meeting but shall be eligible for re-election. Casual vacancies shall be filled by the Committee and the members so appointed shall hold office until the next Annual General Meeting. A quorum shall be members.
- 8. General Meetings.** The Annual General Meeting shall be held at such time as the Committee or a General Meeting shall decide. Ten members shall form a quorum. At the meeting the audited accounts and Secretary's Report shall be submitted and the Officers and Committee for the ensuing year elected. Special General Meetings shall be called upon the requisition in writing to the Secretary of at least ten members. No party-political or sectarian discussions shall be raised or resolutions proposed at either Committee or General Meeting.
- 9. Bank Account.** The Committee shall open a banking account in the name of the Association and all monies received from any source on behalf of the Association shall be paid into such account. Two out of three signatories shall sign cheques.
- 10. Auditors.** Two auditors shall be appointed, who are not members of the Committee, to audit the accounts and report thereon to the Annual General Meeting.
- 11. Membership of** The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd shall be applied for and it shall be a condition of membership to agree to pay such annual affiliation contributions as may from time to time be prescribed.

Note. The subscription to be charged sometimes presents a problem; some people being under the impression that subscriptions should not be fixed too high. A sensible approach is necessary and the finest associations are those whose subscriptions enable them to provide the services that are necessary to keep its membership together. It is suggested that the affiliation fee of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd., be included, with the knowledge of the member, in the subscription.

Duties of Officers of Local Associations

The Chairperson

A good Chairperson is a person who commands respect derived from their ability, personality and character and sometimes from their integrity and attitude to their fellow members. Occasionally a person chosen as a Chairperson combines all of these qualities.

Usually a Chairperson of an Allotment and Leisure Garden Association is elected annually and their duties will not only include taking the chair at meetings of the Association's Committee, but also seeing to it that the affairs of the Association are being properly conducted in the best interests of the members. The best Chairperson, therefore, is someone who is willing to work hard and conscientiously in the cause of his/her fellow members, and is able to inspire others to do the same. If you add to these attitudes tact, patience, impartiality, resourcefulness, firmness and courtesy, and you can find someone who combines them all; you should have a really good Chairperson.

Duties and Responsibilities

A new Chairperson usually takes over from the retiring Chairperson at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting when he/she is elected, but he/she must be prepared to take the chair when invited to do so by the retiring Chairperson, perhaps when the election of Officers and Committee for the ensuing year has been completed. By this time the major part of the proceedings will probably be over and all that will be left for he/she to do will be to bring the meeting to a close in accordance with the agenda.

His first real test as a Chairperson will probably come with the first meeting of the Committee. Before this takes place, however, he/she should have memorised the rules of the Association and so be in a position to see that they are complied with it all times. He/she will also have conferred with the Secretary about the Association's affairs generally, and in particular about the business before the Committee, so that each knows what the other is going to say. This is most important if meetings are to be conducted smoothly and efficiently.

Whilst Committee Meetings are generally friendly affairs, they should not be so informal that at the end of the evening no one is quite sure what was decided, and the Chairperson and Secretary are left to interpret the 'feeling of the meeting' rather than to carry out firm decisions. This is a matter that is very much in the hands of the Chairperson.

For all meetings he/she should ensure that the Secretary has prepared an Agenda. This should preferably have been duplicated and sent to members before the meeting commences. After the discussion on each particular item the Chairperson should state what, in his/her view, the decision was, and this should be agreed before the next item is dealt with. This allows the Secretary to make authoritative notes.

Apart from taking the chair at meetings, the Chairperson must at all times keep in touch with the other Officers and ensure that the Association's rules and objects are followed. He/she must always keep in mind the interests of the members and he/she should be prepared to initiate changes in policy to meet changing circumstances. If he/she expects the Committee and other key members to work hard in the interests of the Association, he/she should, themselves, lead by example. A good Chairperson gets things done by the consent and with the help of members. He/she should not act first and seek approval afterwards, except in emergencies.

Procedure at Meetings

At all meetings the Chairperson is in charge and the members must obey his/her ruling on all matters. He/she should have made certain well beforehand that the meeting had been called in accordance with the rules.

At Annual General Meetings the procedure is very similar to that of ordinary meetings, except that the annual reports of the Treasurer and Secretary should be given, perhaps followed by the Chairperson's remarks. Then the election of Officers for the ensuing year must take place.

Unless the Association's Rules make special alternative provision for the election of Officers and Committee, nominations may be handed in on slips or made verbally. When the Officers are about to be elected the Chairperson in office steps down and a 'temporary' Chairperson takes over until that part of the proceedings has been completed. Each Officer and Committee member should be proposed, seconded and voted upon separately, unless it is decided to re-elect the Committee en-bloc. This latter procedure sometimes commends itself, but it has the disadvantages that it may keep out new blood and perhaps new ideas.

At Special General Meetings, which have been called for a specific purpose, only the business set out on the notice calling the meeting may be discussed.

The Conduct of Meetings

One of the most important rules at meetings is that members must always address the Chairperson and not each other. All members must remain seated whilst the Chairperson is standing. If he/she rises when a member is speaking, that member must resume their seat. The Chairperson may call to order any member who speaks on irrelevant matters or upon matters previously decided. All members have a right to speak once on any subject that is before the meeting. If they wish to speak again they must not do so unless the Chairperson gives permission. Movers of resolutions have a right to reply to points raised in the discussion.

Whenever possible, Special Resolutions should be sent to the Secretary before the meeting. Discussion should not be allowed until a resolution is seconded. Resolutions may only be withdrawn with the consent of the mover and seconder. An amendment may modify, add to, or be substituted for a resolution, though strictly speaking an entirely different set of words is not an amendment; but a Chairperson sometimes treats it as such. Any number of amendments may be proposed and seconded, but the one before the meeting should be disposed of before another is accepted. Should an amendment be carried by the requisite majority, the Chairperson should then put it to the meeting to be voted upon as a substantive motive. If the same is carried, no further amendment can be moved. Amendments cannot be accepted at Special Meetings called for a specific purpose (such as the revision of rules) when the voting must either be for or against the proposals circulated.

When a resolution has been passed, something of a non-controversial character may be added, with the consent of the mover and seconder. This is not an amendment but a 'rider'. Voting may be by show of hands or by ballot, as the meeting may decide. If the rules do not lay down by what majority a resolution shall be carried a clear majority determines the matter. A Secretary may vote only if he/she is a member of the Association or of the Committee, as the case may be. The Chairperson not only possesses a vote but he/she may use their vote and give a casting vote besides. Usually, however, the Chairperson does not vote unless he/she has very strong feelings on a matter, or when he/she has to give a casting vote.

If it is desired to close the discussion on any resolution or matter before the meeting, the closure should be moved and seconded as follows: 'I move the closure of this resolution' or, 'I move that the question be now put'. A motion to adjourn the meeting may be proposed and seconded. The Chairperson should not allow any discussion on motions for closure or adjournment. To terminate discussion on certain matters a motion to proceed with the next business is sometimes moved. A Chairperson needs to be discreet in accepting such motions, but if accepted, discussion should not be allowed upon them.

A point of order may be raised at any time (a) if a speaker is not dealing with the subject under discussion or (b) if a speaker is not observing standing orders. The raiser should state his point briefly and should not be allowed to make a speech. The Chairperson may accept or reject a point of order - it cannot be discussed - and his/her ruling is final and binding.

Persons perpetually raising points of order should be firmly but kindly dealt with!

If a member is guilty of improper conduct at a meeting and will not obey the Chairperson's ruling, he/she should be asked to withdraw. Should he/she decline, reasonable force may be used to eject him/her and if he/she becomes violent to those whose duty it is to remove him, he renders himself liable to prosecution.

The Secretary

The office of Secretary with any association must always be an important one. Whilst the Chairperson is looked to for leadership, it is the Secretary who is expected to carry out the decisions of the committee, and between General Meetings or Committee Meetings, he/she is responsible only to the Chairperson. While it is inevitable that the Secretary will have a considerable influence on the policy of an association, he must act in accordance with the decisions of the committee, or where matters of emergency arise between committee meetings then with the Chairperson's agreement.

A good Secretary must be a good administrator and a capable correspondent. He should have sufficient time at his disposal to meet the duties of his office, for it is important that correspondence and other matters should be dealt with promptly.

Working with a committee, the Secretary should be a person of good conduct and with sufficient balance and confidence in them to carry out the decisions of the committee without fear or favour.

Duties and Responsibilities

The first duty of a Secretary appointed to a newly formed association would probably be to call a meeting of the committee. An up-to-date list of the names and addresses of all the officers and committee members should, of course, be kept. To avoid the labour of writing individual notes, a good Secretary will have cards printed for calling committee meetings and will fill in the details of time and place on the lines left blank. If there are any particular items on the agenda for the meeting, these can be written on the white space left at the bottom of the card.

Before the meeting assembles the Secretary should have prepared an agenda, in consultation with the Chairperson. It is also his/her business to maintain a minute book in which the minutes of the Committee Meetings are recorded and an attendance book which is passed round at meetings for members to sign. Alternatively, he/she may himself write up the attendance book.

At the meeting the Secretary must remain alert and make a careful note of each decision as and when it is taken. If he/she is in any doubt as to what has been decided (and this often happens) then he/she should ask the Chairperson to clarify the point.

After the meeting, as soon as the decisions taken have been recorded in the minute book (this is best done at once while the facts are still clear in the mind) the Secretary must proceed to implement these decisions as soon as possible, as it may be found that replies to letters will not come as quickly as and may not, in fact, be in time for the next committee meeting.

In reporting to his committee, the Secretary should, as far as possible, confine remarks to business that has been accomplished and not dwell too much on business which is in hand and which will probably be finalised at the following meeting. Much time can be saved this way.

A great asset to an Honorary Secretary is to have the habit of neatness and method in keeping records and dealing with correspondence. This can be acquired by a little application and will serve him/her in good stead during the period of office. It is, of course, essential that a Secretary should not be afraid to speak in public and he/she should have the ability to express themselves without diverging from the point and thereby wasting the time of the meeting. This having been said, it is not at all necessary for a Secretary to be an accomplished orator, and he/she should not attempt to assume the role of leading committee member as well as Secretary at meetings. He should be the expert in the affairs of the association, ever ready to give help and advice and prepared to keep the Chairperson and committee members informed and up-to-date on all matters of concern to the association.

Where the rules provide for a quorum it is the Chairperson's duty to insist that this minimum number of members is present before he opens the meeting. Having welcomed those attending, the Chairperson's first duty is strictly speaking to ask the Secretary to read out the notice convening the meeting but in practice this formality is often dispensed with. Instead he/she will ask the Secretary to read out any apologies from persons who have been unable to attend, followed by the minutes of the previous meeting. These are then

'put' by the Chairperson with the words 'Is it your wish that I sign these as a correct record'. With the approval of the meeting he/she signs them in ink, with the date.

The next business should be to deal with matters arising from the minutes. These must be dealt with one by one in the order in which they come up. The procedure often involves bringing in correspondence that the Secretary has conducted since the previous meeting. Sometimes the correspondence is lengthy - in which case the Chairperson should tactfully ask the Secretary to summarize what has been written. This can save much time and boredom. When matters arising from the minutes have been dealt with, any remaining correspondence may be considered, unless it relates to special items on the agenda concerned with the main business. It is important that all decisions be clearly stated by the Chairperson before the next item is taken. If these are the result of a formal 'motion', duly seconded and passed by a majority of those present, so much the better.

Under the heading 'any other business', members of the committee meeting or general meeting may raise any matter that is not on the agenda. 'Any other business' items should be discouraged. They could generally have been placed on the agenda and members should be urged to send notes in writing to the Secretary of matters they wished raised. Snap decisions on 'any other business' items are very frequently bad decisions. Finally, the date of the next meeting should, if possible, be decided or announced.

Sometimes ordinary meetings are devoted partly to formal business and partly to a talk given by a specially invited speaker. Unless the speaker has been asked to give the talk at a particular time, it is sometimes desirable to ask the guest to talk first and to deal with the formal business afterwards.

A guest speaker should always be introduced by the Chairperson, who should state clearly their name and the subject on which they are to speak and, if possible facts about their background. Before the speaker commences, it is customary for the Chairperson to arrange with them the length of time they expect to talk, otherwise they might go on indefinitely and leave no time for questions or any other business. If a speaker has exceeded his time, a note placed in front of him to this effect invariably has the desired result. If it has been agreed to answer questions, the Chairperson should invite these as soon as the talk is finished. It is always wise for the Chairperson to have at least one question prepared in case no one in the audience is ready to get up. This may save embarrassment to all concerned and at the same time encourage others.

Before a guest speaker arrives at a meeting, the Chairperson should arrange with two members of the audience to propose and second a vote of thanks, preferably approaching persons who have some experience and know what is required. The proposer should not commence until invited to do so by the Chairperson, otherwise he might interfere with the arrangements that the Chairperson has in mind. Should a vote of thanks have not been arranged beforehand, and the Chairperson feels uncertain about calling upon anyone from the audience, he/she should thank the speaker.

Sometimes newly formed associations grow rapidly and the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary increase in proportion. Perhaps the association sets up a trading section and a show committee. It is at this stage that the Secretary should not attempt to do more than he can manage.

The trading section should appoint its own Secretary and so should the show committee if there is any possible likelihood that the person who agreed to take on the job of association Secretary will be overworked. In any case, it is usually far better to spread the work of an association over as many helpers as possible. This insures against complete breakdown if one person is doing all the work of a large association, and then through illness or any other reason is unable to carry on.

The Secretary of an allotment and garden association should acquire as soon as possible the special knowledge that he/she may need if the association's affairs are to be administered efficiently. A good Secretary will keep up to date by reading the general gardening literature that is available. Apart from the popular gardening press, the National Society regularly circulates literature which is of the utmost importance to Secretaries if they are to keep abreast of events.

Some of the larger Associations, and particular those which administer land, are registered under the Industrial & Provident Societies Acts. Secretaries of these Associations must send annual returns to the Registrar of Friendly Societies and comply with certain other regulations, which are all clearly stated in the registered rules. For these reasons it is essential that a Secretary who has been appointed by a registered body should thoroughly acquaint themselves with the rules at the earliest opportunity.

The Treasurer

Not all associations appoint a separate Treasurer, the office instead being incorporated with that of Secretary. This practice has the advantage that the problem of liaison between the two is removed. Apart from this practical advantage, however, it is generally agreed that it is better to have a separate Treasurer. It is, of course, the Treasurer's duty to be responsible for an Association's finances, to ensure that money is only spent as directed by the committee. He/she should be a person used to figures and keeping of accounts. Integrity and method are attributes essential in a Treasurer of an allotment and garden association. He/she does not need to be a financial wizard as there is usually little money to invest, but he/she should maintain a keen interest in the financial affairs of the association and if he/she sees that funds are getting low he/she should try to suggest ways of increasing income to meet the association's proper commitments.

Duties

The Treasurer should take charge of all monies paid to the association and pay all bills, preferably by cheque. To do this he/she should open a banking account in the name of the association, if this has not already been done. It is the Treasurer's business to see to it that the Secretary has sufficient petty cash to meet incidental expenses such as for stamps, stationery, etc to the state of the association's finances.

Before each Annual General Meeting it is the Treasurer's duty to prepare an account of receipts and payments for the year which will have just ended. This account should show comparative figures for the preceding year, so that the members can see how things are going financially with all of the association's activities. If an association has a sizeable turnover and owns a number of assets, it may be desirable to prepare two main accounts, one known as a profit and loss account and the other as a balance sheet.

When presenting the accounts at the Annual Meetings, the Treasurer should preferably have had prepared copies of the accounts in sufficient quantity to provide one for each member attending. He/she then need not read out a mere list of figures, but can comment on particular items and make comparisons with previous years for the benefit of the meeting. (With associations registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, a copy of the audited account for the year must be sent to every shareholder member, with the notice calling the Annual General Meeting). A good Treasurer can make the annual report a most interesting one and this is a fitting completion of his/her year's work on behalf of his/her fellows.

If there are any matters not covered or any points on which you are not sure, you should write or telephone National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Head Office for more information.

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