Best Allotment Watering System & Irrigation Setup UK 2026

Composited off the Internet

By Gareth Richards

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Sort your watering out properly and you go from an hour with a can each evening to ten minutes twice a week. It's also what stands between a decent crop and the July afternoon you turn up to find everything bolted or crisped. Maybe you just want a hose that reaches, maybe you want a timer doing the job while you're at work. Either way, these are the setups that make sense on a UK plot. I've compared them on price, on what the parts are made of, and on how forgiving they are when life gets in the way and you can't get down for a week.

Our Top Picks

These are the ones worth your money out of what's easy to get hold of in the UK.

Product	Type	Price	Rating	Best For	Buy
GARDENA Micro-Drip Raised Bed Set	Modular micro -drip	£77.88	4.5★ (217)	Best Overall	Check price
100L Slimline Water Butt Kit	Rain water · stand + tap	£33.94	4.5★ (682)	Best for Rainwater	Check price
RESTMO LCD 2-Zone Tap Timer	Battery timer · 2 zones	£39.99	4.6★ (61)	Best Timer	Check price
Hozelock Compact Hose Reel	25m Hose reel + nozzle	£37.99	4.4★ (8,726)	Best Hose Setup	Check price

Product	Type	Price	Rating	Best For	Buy
73m Drip Irrigation Kit	Drip irrigation · timer -ready	£19.99	3.7★ (4)	Best Budget	Check price

1
GARDENA Micro-Drip Raised Bed Set
4.5★ on Amazon · 217 ratings · £77.88
If you're only buying one thing off this page, buy this. GARDENA's nozzles meter the water precisely rather than just dribbling it out, and the system is modular, so you bolt on more line as you take on more beds instead of starting again. This is their set sized for raised beds. Because GARDENA is what much of Europe runs for drip, you can still find spare parts for it years later, which is not true of the cheap kits. It's the most expensive thing here at around £78, and it's the one I'd not want to replace.

Precise, metered water delivery
Modular, so you expand bed by bed
Sized for raised beds (up to 35 plants)
GARDENA parts easy to find later

2
100L Slimline Water Butt Kit
4.5★ on Amazon · 682 ratings · £33.94
Most sites make you share a standpipe that's nowhere near your beds. Stick a butt under the shed downpipe and you're catching rain for free, with the water sat right where you need it. 100L is the size I'd point a beginner at — enough to matter, but you can still shift it across the plot on your own when it's empty. This British-made kit comes with the stand and tap ready to go.

100L of free rainwater
Comes with stand and tap
Slimline — fits tight spots
Cuts trips to the standpipe

3
RESTMO LCD 2-Zone Tap Timer
4.6★ on Amazon · 61 ratings · £39.99
A drip kit only pays off once something else is turning it on. This screws onto a standpipe tap and opens the valve to whatever schedule you set, say a soak at six in the morning and another at eight in the evening. Two zones means you can run the greenhouse on a different schedule to the beds, which matters more than it sounds when one is drying out twice as fast as the other. Brass inlet rather than plastic, so it doesn't crack the first time you overtighten it, and a pair of AA batteries covers a season. This is the upgrade that turns watering from a chore into something that happens without you.

Two independent zones on one tap
Brass inlet, not plastic
Runs a season on two AA batteries
Needs mains pressure; a gravity butt will not open it reliably

4
Hozelock Compact Hose Reel 25m
4.4★ on Amazon · 8,726 ratings · £37.99
Sometimes you just want a hose that reaches. This Hozelock reel comes with 25m of hose, a nozzle and the connectors to get going. The real reason to start here is the fittings: Hozelock is what everyone on site already runs, so whatever you buy next clicks straight on instead of leaving you hunting for an adapter. With nearly 9,000 reviews, it's the safe default.

25m hose, nozzle and fittings included
Hozelock-compatible, the site standard
Reel keeps the hose tidy
Over 8,700 reviews at 4.4★

5
73m Drip Irrigation Kit
3.7★ on Amazon · 4 ratings · £19.99
If £78 for the GARDENA is more than you want to spend on your first season, this is the cheap way in. Twenty quid gets you 73 metres of line, which is enough for four to six raised beds, and it takes a timer the same as anything else. Water goes to the roots instead of into the air, so you use a fraction of what a can does. The honest caveat: it's a new listing with four reviews sitting at 3.7, so nobody knows yet how it holds up over a couple of winters. Buy it to find out whether drip suits you, then spend properly once you know it does.

Cheapest way to try drip irrigation
73m of line covers several beds
Timer-ready
Runs off a water butt or tap

Designing an Allotment Irrigation System with No Tap and No Power
An allotment irrigation system has to solve a problem a garden one doesn't: there is usually no tap on your plot and never any electricity. That single constraint decides most of the design for you, so it's worth settling before you buy anything.

Work backwards from your water source. If the site has a standpipe within hose reach, you can run a battery tap timer and a drip kit off it and be done. If the nearest tap is three plots away, your source is rainwater, which means a butt or an IBC tank fed off the shed roof, raised on blocks so gravity does the pushing. If you want it automated with no tap at all, that's where a solar pump kit earns its money.

Each of those routes is covered in full further down: where the water comes from, timers and solar, and the step-by-step build.

Two things catch people out. Gravity feed gives you very little pressure, roughly 0.1 bar per metre of height, so a butt on low blocks will run a short drip line and will not run a sprinkler or a long run of seep hose. And most sites have rules about what you can leave connected to a shared standpipe, so check your tenancy agreement before you plumb anything semi-permanent into it.

The order that works: sort out storage first, then delivery, then automation. A water butt with a watering can beats an expensive drip kit with nothing to feed it.

Types of Allotment Watering Systems
Four approaches cover almost every plot. Most people end up combining two of them — say a drip line on the beds and a soaker hose down the fruit.

Drip irrigation (13mm and 4mm pipe with emitters)
Drip is the workhorse. A 13mm supply pipe runs the length of your beds, and thin 4mm feeder pipes branch off it to individual drippers (emitters) that release water slowly at each plant's roots. Because the water goes straight into the soil rather than over the leaves, you lose almost nothing to evaporation and the foliage stays dry, which cuts blight and mildew. It runs off a tap or a water butt, and it's the system most kits are built around.

Seep and soaker hose

A seep hose (or soaker hose) is a porous pipe that weeps water along its whole length. It's cheaper and quicker to lay than a dripper network, and suits rows of the same crop or a fruit border where you want an even soak rather than targeted drips. The trade-off is control: it wets everything it touches, and output tails off along a long run. For raised beds and mixed rows, buried under mulch, it does a fine job.

Self-watering and wick systems

Where you have no water supply at all, a wick watering system pulls water up from a reservoir by capillary action, so a container or bucket keeps a plant going for days. The classic allotment version is ring culture for tomatoes: plants sit in bottomless pots on a bed of gravel, feeding from the top ring and drinking from the base. Handy for greenhouse tomatoes and thirsty container crops, though not something you'd run a whole plot on.

Sprinkler versus drip

Sprinklers and spray systems throw water over a wide area, which looks efficient and is anything but. Much of it evaporates or drifts, the leaves get wet and invite disease, and on an allotment they're usually the first thing banned in a drought. Drip delivers roughly the same growth on a fraction of the water. On a plot, drip wins nearly every time — keep a sprinkler for the lawn at home.

Where Does the Water Come From? Mains vs Rainwater

This decides your whole setup. Many sites have a standpipe you can walk to but no tap at your bed, and some have no mains at all. Rainwater is free, softer on plants than treated mains, and not restricted during a hosepipe ban, so it's worth collecting whether you have a tap or not.

Water butts and IBC storage tanks

A water butt off a shed or greenhouse roof is the starting point. For real storage, an IBC tank — the 1000-litre caged container — holds enough to run drip lines through a dry spell. Link two butts with a connector kit and you bank far more of the winter rain that would otherwise run off. Fit a lid or fine mesh to keep out leaves, mosquito larvae and the light that feeds algae.

Gravity feed for plots with no tap

Here's the trick that makes off-grid watering work: raise the tank. Water pressure comes from height, so a butt sat on blocks or a sturdy stand feeds a drip line by gravity alone, with no pump and no electricity. Get the outlet a good half-metre or more above the beds and a low-pressure drip kit will run happily off it — plenty of plots with no tap water themselves this way for the price of a butt and a length of pipe.

Automatic & Timer-Controlled Watering

A system that runs itself is what lets you go away in August without losing the plot. Three levels, cheapest first.

Battery tap timers

A battery tap timer screws onto a mains tap and opens the valve on a schedule you set, say a soak at 6am and again at 8pm. It needs mains pressure to open. A gravity-fed butt will not push through one reliably, so on a plot with no tap skip to the solar kits below. A pair of AA batteries lasts a full season. Hozelock and Gardena make the ones most allotmenteers use, from about £25. If your site has a standpipe within hose reach, it's the best-value upgrade you can make.

Solar-powered, weather-responsive kits

For a plot with no power, a solar kit is the answer. Irrigatia is the name to know: a small panel runs a pump off a water butt, and the clever versions read light levels to water more in bright, drying weather and less when it's dull. Weather-responsive watering, no wiring. It costs more than a battery timer but needs neither mains nor a tap.

Smart, off-grid controllers with moisture sensors
At the top end, off-grid smart controllers such as the Harvst WaterMate add a soil moisture sensor and app control, so the system waters on what the soil actually needs rather than a fixed clock. Overkill for a couple of beds; genuinely useful for a greenhouse or polytunnel full of thirsty plants you can't check daily.

5 Automatic Watering Kits Compared
If you specifically want a set-and-forget kit rather than building a full system, here's the quick comparison by need and budget.

Kit	Needs	Best for	Price	Buy
Drip kit (timer extra)	Tap or butt	Most plots	~£20	73m drip kit irrigation
Digital tap timer	Mains tap	Sites with standpipes	~£40	RESTMO LCD tap timer
Solar auto system	Sun + water butt	No-mains plots	~£29	SoulBay solar irrigation kit
Gravity butt drip Kit	Raised water	butt Off-grid, no pump	~£15	Compare gravity kits
Micro spray Kit	Tap or pump	Greenhouses, seedlings	~£15	25m micro spray kit

How to Set Up a Drip System Step by Step

You can build a working drip system in an afternoon. Here's the order that saves you redoing it.

One job before you lay a single line: if the bed is compacted, break it open with a fork first. Drip water sits on the surface of panned soil instead of soaking in. Our pick of the best garden fork covers which ones cope with heavy clay.

Plan and sketch your beds. Mark where the supply pipe runs and count the plants that need a dripper. This tells you how much 13mm pipe, how much 4mm pipe and how many emitters to buy, and saves you three trips to the shop.

Connect to the tap or butt, with an inline filter. Fit an inline filter at the source, especially on butt water, or grit and algae clog the drippers within weeks. Add your tap timer here too.

Lay the supply pipe and install the drippers. Run the 13mm pipe along the beds and peg it down. Punch in the 4mm feeders where you need them and push a dripper onto the end at each plant. Cap the far end of the supply pipe.

Set the timer and test the flow. Run one full cycle while you stand and watch. Check every dripper actually drips, look for leaks at the joints, and adjust the run time until the soil is wet but not flooded. Find the fault now, not from a hundred miles away.

Lay the pipe before the plants get big. Threading 4mm line through a mature bed of climbing beans is a miserable job; doing it at planting-out takes two minutes.

Watering Schedule and Best Time of Day

Water deeply and less often. A long soak every two or three days sends roots down chasing moisture; a daily sprinkle keeps them shallow and helpless the moment you miss a day. Early morning is the best time — cool soil, little evaporation, and plants charged up before the heat. Evening is the runner-up. Midday watering mostly evaporates before it does any good. Set a timer for a dawn cycle and you get the ideal window without setting an alarm.

Hosepipe Bans: Is Drip Irrigation Still Allowed?

Good news, and a common worry. During a UK hosepipe ban (a Temporary Use Ban), drip and trickle irrigation is usually exempt, and water from a butt isn't covered by the ban at all. A ban restricts mains water, not the rain you've collected. What bans target is sprinklers and hosepipes run straight off the mains, so a drip system fed from a water butt can keep going right through a drought. Wordings vary between water companies, so check your own supplier's current notice before you assume, but the collected-rainwater route is almost always safe.

Costs and Running Expenses

A watering system is cheap set against a season of failed crops. Rough UK prices in 2026:

Drip irrigation kit: £20–25 for a generic starter kit covering a few beds, around £80 for the Gardena raised-bed set.
Battery tap timer: £25–45 for a Hozelock or Gardena.
Water butt: £30–60, or an IBC tank often cheap-to-free second-hand.
Gravity butt drip setup: under £40 all in, and nothing to run.
Solar kit: around £30 for a small solar pump kit, or about £90 for a weather-responsive controller, with no running cost after that.
Running costs come to next to nothing if you feed from rainwater: no metered water, no electricity, just a set of batteries once a season. Even off a metered mains tap, drip uses so little that the bill barely moves.

Maintenance and Winterising

A drip system needs a little care to last, mostly against two enemies: clogging and frost.

Clean the filter monthly through the season, more often on butt water. A blocked filter starves the whole line.

Check and replace emitters that have clogged or popped off.

Flush the lines by uncapping the ends and letting them run clear a couple of times a year.

Drain everything before the first frost. Water left in pipes and timers freezes, expands and cracks the plastic. Disconnect the timer and bring it indoors, run the butts down a little, and open the low points so the lines drain. A split timer housing in spring is the classic avoidable expense.

Water-Saving Techniques That Reduce Watering

The cheapest litre is the one you never have to apply. A few habits cut how much work any system has to do:

Mulch heavily. A thick layer of compost, straw or grass clippings over damp soil slows evaporation right down and smothers the weeds that would drink your water.

Build up organic matter. Compost-rich soil holds water like a sponge; thin, sandy soil lets it drain straight through. Every barrow of muck lengthens how long a bed stays moist.

Water the roots, not the leaves, which is exactly what drip does — another reason it beats a sprinkler.

Deep-water, then leave it. Training roots downward with occasional heavy soaks makes plants far more drought-tough than frequent light watering ever will.

Get these right and even a modest gravity kit will carry your plot through most of a British summer.

Frequently Asked Questions

How much water does an allotment need?

Reckon on 20-50 litres per square metre a week through summer. On a full 250sqm plot that's anywhere from 5,000 to 12,500 litres a week, which sounds mad until you're carrying it. Catch rainwater and run drip lines and you knock a huge chunk off that.

Should I use a water butt or rely on the standpipe?

Have both. The butt gives you free rainwater sitting right by your beds, so it's your everyday source. Keep the standpipe for topping the butt back up when there's been no rain for weeks. Nearly every site lets you run a butt off the shed roof, so there's no reason not to.

What is the best irrigation system for raised beds?

Drip lines on a timer, nothing else comes close. Tuck the lines under a layer of mulch and you lose far less to evaporation. A basic kit handles four to six raised beds, and on a metered supply it tends to pay for itself inside one season.

Can I leave an allotment watering system running unattended?

A timer-controlled drip system is built for exactly that. Just walk the connections once a week to check nothing's worked loose, and nudge the timer as the seasons change. What you don't want to do is leave a sprinkler running. It throws water everywhere and the damp leaves invite mildew.

Can I use a drip irrigation system during a hosepipe ban?

Usually yes. Most UK water companies exempt drip and trickle irrigation, and rainwater from a water butt isn't covered by a ban at all. It's mains sprinklers that bans target. Check your own supplier's current wording to be sure.

How much does an allotment watering system cost?

A basic drip kit is about £20, and the GARDENA raised-bed set is around £78. A battery tap timer adds £25 to £40. A gravity-fed water butt setup can be built for under £40. Weather-responsive solar kits start around £90.

How We Choose

We go for kit that lasts, doesn't cost silly money, and is easy to buy in the UK. Established brands with a warranty behind them win out, because spare parts still exist three years on. We check every product is actually on sale on Amazon UK before we list it. Prices and ratings checked 25 July 2026.

Where to start

If you have a tap, a drip kit and a battery timer does most of the work. If you only have a butt, put it on a stand and feed the drip line by gravity, and add a solar pump kit if you want it on a schedule.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

gareth.richards@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contibute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenteering and best wishes,

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