

PGT AWARD REPORT

This report gives a few details regarding my experience at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in Oxfordshire.

I was lucky enough to receive an award from the PGT that covered my daily transportation to and from the site. Le manoir is renowned as the home to Raymond Blanc's restaurant and hotel but also houses a large organic vegetable garden where much of the produce for the restaurant and cookery school is grown. Their speciality in allowing them to produce 2 star Michelin foods is the fact they produce much of their signature veg themselves, most interesting of these are the micro greens.

Micro greens are produced at Le Manoir 365 days a year, a micro green is a tiny seedling that can sometimes only be a few weeks old, they are sown as normal seeds but harvested when around 50mm high, they are cropped every morning and taken to the kitchen by 10 ready to be prepped and used in the dishes on the menu, the choice of "micros" they grow are rotated seasonally to give great variety and different flavours to suit the food. At this time of the year the big growers are Basil, Coriander, Celery leaf and mustards along with radish and beetroot for added colour.

One other speciality they grow are courgette flowers, 220 plants are planted in their poly tunnel each year, then each morning the staff hand pick all the flowers that are open and send them to the kitchen, these are then used in a variety of dishes, either stuffed, steamed or battered in tempura.

The garden practices strictly organically, this is thanks to the excellent knowledge of the veg gardeners and the good practices like crop rotation, prevention rather than cure, i.e. growing carrots in a barrier or brassicas under netting, and feeding the plants well to fend off disease.

The gardeners and chefs have regular meetings to allow a smooth transition between seasons and a plentiful supply for the kitchen.

From my time there I have learnt how very important it is to pick and cook with veg as every minute counts from the moment it is harvested as flavour starts to fade, also how using the right type of variety to produce the crop you want helps organically, growing under poly tunnels vastly extends the growing season and with addition of grow lamps that micro greens are able to be harvested all year round.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with their wonderful team and am greatly thankful to the Finnis Scott award for allowing me to learn more and further my veg growing knowledge.

Luke Price



