

My name is Nijel Collingham and I am a gardener based in North Devon. I gave my job in I.T mostly due to the stressful nature of the work and also because I was working from home, my children were now all grown up and I was feeling detached from the world sat on my computer all day.

I have always enjoyed gardening and decided to put an advert in the local post office (remember them) and got a couple of lawn mowing jobs.

I quickly realized I needed to improve my knowledge particularly in areas such as pruning and decided to study RHS level 2 practical at Rosemoor, Torrington one afternoon a week.

On completion of this course I had a bit more confidence and after getting a couple more part time gardening jobs I decided to quit the I.T work and concentrate on gardening so I bought a small van and some more tools and put a small advert in the local magazine.

One lucky break I had was getting a job on a small country estate which meant I had some work over the winter as well. It also meant I had a much more varied work with two walled gardens I was soon in charge of the vegetables and the fruit fans and espaliers.

I continued my studies with the RHS and completed the module

## Principles of Garden Planning, Establishment and Maintenance.

Although I was much happier gardening my overall income was very low and for the final year of the course I was lucky enough to get a grant for from the PGT for £370.00. This allowed me to study

## Principles of Plant Growth, Propagation and Development

and complete my level 2 diploma..

I passed the first 2 exams in February with commendations and I am waiting for the results from the June exams.

The course covered several useful subjects including plant classification, plant nutrition, plant health and plant propagation.

I found the plant classification particularly interesting and the plant health and nutrition very helpful in my gardening work. Learning about several different ways to propagate different species from cuttings was also very informative. The only thing I did not like about the RHS course were the exams which often seemed to cover only small amounts of the course content, have ambiguous questions and erratic marking schemes but that was more than made up for by the quality of the teaching.

I was very lucky to be taught by Ian Smith who not only teaches you all you need to pass the exams but also a host of other practical information you wouldn't get doing the course by correspondence. He was also very active in passing on job opportunities he heard about and getting his students started off on their gardening careers.

Since completing the course I feel much more confident when I am working and now see myself as a gardener. I realize I still have a lot to learn and would like to continue with the level 3 course in the future but at the moment that is not taught in North Devon.

Ian Smith on left.

