

## Royal Horticulture Society

### Level 2 Certificate in the Principles of Garden Planning, Establishment and Maintenance

Capel Manor College, Regents Park, London.

Report by Florence Duncan-Antoine

Since starting in my new role at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew as a horticulturist within the Arboretum Nursery, I realised that I had a huge opportunity to gain as much experience as I could. It very quickly became clear that I had many gaps in my knowledge and wanted to start to fill those by completing my Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Level 2 in Horticulture.

I had completed four units of the level 2 in 2013 which was funded by myself but was unable to fund the full course fees so decided that half the course would give me great set of tools to go further into my career. It's only now that I have been able to complete it.

By completing the course I have not only gained huge amounts of knowledge but have also helped my employer and co-workers, the information I have gathered over the last six months will hugely benefit my work. I now feel my confidence has grown and be able to complete my day to day work with the understanding needed.

The Course content:

The qualification provides knowledge of the principles which underpin professional horticultural practices. The qualification consists of four mandatory units which cover the following topics:

- Principles of garden planning and garden plant selection
- Establishment and maintenance of garden plants and lawns
- Cultural operations and production methods for outdoor vegetable and fruit crops
- Protected environments (greenhouses, polythene tunnels and cold frames) and their use in plant cultivation

Who is the qualification intended for?

The qualification is intended for those wishing to work in professional horticulture in a variety of roles. It is designed to provide the underpinning knowledge of plants and horticultural practices. It is suitable for those wishing to enter horticultural employment for the first time; for those who are already working in horticulture who want to develop their knowledge; and for those who wish to progress to further horticultural study at level 3. The units in the qualification are designed for part-time study so it is particularly suitable for those who are working in the industry and wishing to study part-time in order to progress their careers or prepare for further study at level 3. It is also suitable for those who wish to enter horticulture as a change of career and are seeking the

necessary foundation knowledge.

### Principles of garden planning and garden plant selection

This unit has given me a huge understanding of an array of garden plants such as: Hardy annuals, Bulbs corms and tubers, Spring and Summer bedding displays, herbaceous perennials, aquatic plants, alpine plants, shrubs, trees and many uses for each topic such as hedges, autumn and winter displays .

This unit has helped me to understand the importance of right plant right place along with the planning of a space to give you maximum space and pleasure.

This knowledge will really help at Kew, not only have I been able to learn a huge amount of plant names but I now understand their habits, their soil requirements and where best to place them in a garden or park environment. This will help with my current position as I propagate trees, shrubs,



herbaceous perennials, bulbs and grasses. There are many opportunities for furthering my career at Kew so this plant knowledge will help with understanding across the entire gardens.

In the nursery we look after important and rare species of plants including bulbs (left) that have been hand collected from Spain.

I can feel much more confident while caring for the bulbs now I have gained some practical and theory based knowledge.

The course did a fortnightly plant identification test which helped enormously to learn spellings and the meanings of plant names in latin.

As a group we went botanising for our ident tests with our tutor, this gave us great encouragement and helped us to get up close and personal with all the plants within Regents Park.

### Establishment and maintenance of garden plants and lawns

This unit slightly crosses over with garden planning as both require a large amount of plant knowledge. This course focuses on the plants and how best to care for them and where to use them.

This unit also describes pest and disease problems that can come with those plants and how to control them using cultural, BioControl and chemical.

This is very helpful for me as I work within a nursery that can get many different plants that come with their own deficiencies and pest and diseases. I'm now much more aware of the pest and disease problems and what to look out for while caring for the variety of plants within the nursery. Since completing my Level 2 I can see a great difference in my approach to pests or diseases.



These are hardwood cuttings of *Cornus sp*, *populus sp*, *rosa sp* *Ulmus sp*.

It's important to know when each plant needs to be propagated and how. The course has given me a great understanding of this which would have taken a long time to build up.

### Cultural operations and production methods for outdoor vegetable and fruit crops

Although this unit might not seem very relevant to my current job I have taken a lot of information from it such as pest and disease control which can affect many of the plants within the nursery. It has also taught me to plan, such as diseases left in the soil for many years so not to plant the same thing in that spot again or to select disease resistant varieties.

These can be relevant to roses or trees or shrubs but can also help my greater understanding of plants and their needs.

I can make use of this unit at any stage of my career as so many factors with gardening stem back to growing your own vegetables and fruit.

A particular interest within this unit was fruit trees and bushes, this is definitely a topic that I would like to bring to the nursery as we don't currently propagate fruit apart from overwintering *Citrus spp*.



Vine weevil larvae are very destructive in nurseries, control of them is very important as well as knowing signs before the problem becomes uncontrollable. We use Biological control such as nematodes.

## Protected environments (greenhouses, polythene tunnels and cold frames) and their use in plant cultivation

This section of the course was very useful for me as I work with protected structures in my current position and what comes with them every day.

The course has helped me significantly to understand the importance of protected structures and what materials are the best for the different uses we use them for.

I currently work with many different protected structures such as propagation tents, polytunnels, glass houses, cold frames and many more. It's very important for me to understand the different technology that goes with each one such as aspirated screens, lighting and misting systems.

As a member of staff in the nursery I am responsible for reporting any problems with these structures and now I feel the confidence to be able to recognise a problem and report it, of which I could not have done before as it would have taken me a lot longer to gain the experience I have taken from the course.





These pictures show some protected structures we have in the nursery, it's important to know the differences of each and what requirements different plants have when being propagated or overwintered for example.

Since completing my course I now understand the basic makeup of these structures which means I can now make and invent my own basic propagation tent used here for *Camellia sp* cuttings.



Now that I have completed my RHS Level 2 in Horticulture I can build on my knowledge and help others to understand the huge topic that is horticulture. I have students, interns, apprentices and volunteers in the nursery so this course meant more to me than just learning for myself. I now means I have the confidence to share and explain tasks more easily with such a huge background knowledge gained from the level 2.

Now with this information I would like to go on to complete my Level 3 in Horticulture which will hugely benefit myself and others around me especially my employer who will feel confident and happy I know what I'm doing. Level 3 is at a professional level which will cover many of the same topics but in greater depth as well as different units such a practical section where propagation and plant health is taught by doing.

This has helped me grow as a person and will only help me further into my career by giving me such a broad knowledge of horticulture. I am now putting my newly found knowledge into my work and others around me which I am confident they will benefit too.

I want to thank the Professional Gardeners Trust and Perennial for enabling me to further my knowledge and experience within my favourite field and career by funding the course and had faith in me as a horticulturist. I hope I can achieve my dream and go deeper into the world of horticulture.

