

Joe McWilliams  
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I taught for 13 years in secondary schools, and one and a half years ago I made the choice to retrain and become a Gardener/Landscaper/Designer.

I received £450 from the Professional Gardeners Trust, towards the £1000 fees for the first year of study of the RHS Level 3 Certificate in the Principles of Plant Growth, Health and Applied Propagation

I studied at Manea School of Gardening under Mary Lahman, and the training lasted from September 2014 to June 2015

I really enjoyed the level and depth of the science involved in this first year of study. It has helped me in numerous ways with clients, knowing the background to some names, being able to talk confidently about various garden issues, for instance the soil and having a broad understanding of plant health issues.

The soil section of the course was the hardest as there was a lot of soil science. Hard to know how much depth to go into on this part. Learning photosynthesis was very hard also, but fascinating. The taxonomy was very useful and I am sad that this is over for the moment. Generally it opened up a whole depth of learning that I only felt that I scratched the surface. This was good generally though as the overview of knowledge will stand me in very good stead for the future.

As an ex teacher, I am aware of the many different teaching styles that can be used in the class room. In an adult education environment, the delivery can be rather didactic at times, and I really wanted to vary things a bit more. It was great to have the structure of formal learning to work with, and have to get things done in a certain time, as if I had done a distance course, it would have been difficult to keep on track. Manea School of

Gardening is a very inspiring place to be, and my course mates are great and we help each other a lot. We had a 3 day trip to the new forest area, which was really excellent. Seeing Hilliers with other like minded people was priceless.

I really hope that I can develop a really broad horticultural career. To start with though I will be in the landscaping, design and maintenance area. Broad enough perhaps, but the RHS sets you up very well for this. I hope that I can use some propagation skills. I will need more practical skills, like pesticide PA1 and PA6, brick work and paving, tree work for the future, but this course has been an excellent set up for me.

**Email note:** I passed 13 out of the 15 credits so I am very pleased. Will retake the one I did not get.