

Dear Helen and Trustees of the Professional Gardeners' Trust,

Thank you for offering me the Manchester Royal Botanic Award of £525 to contribute to my course cost of £795. I have been a self-employed gardener in Cheshire for four years, working a full-time, weekly rota of 10 gardens spending between 2 and 8 hours per garden in both summer and winter. The gardens vary in size and style from large formal gardens with large herbaceous borders, to cottage gardens with fruits and vegetables, to smaller suburban family gardens.

I have used this grant to undertake the RHS Level 3 Practical Horticulture at Reaseheath College in Nantwich. The course is structured so that techniques I learn are reinforced by repeating in the gardens I work in. The course involved many aspects, such as the collection and propagation of seed into a raised seed bed. This has encouraged me to propagate from seed more often in the gardens that I work in, and our own garden, as a cost-effective way of space filling. I also undertook pruning, maintaining and after-care of fruit trees and shrubs by the appropriate methods and at the correct times. I looked into health and safety in the horticultural industry, which is particularly useful for someone self-employed such as myself, as I now know the types of documents that employed gardeners need.



*Fig 1. (L-R) Early spring pruning of climbing roses. Construction of a raised seedbed. Planting and aftercare of Prunus avium. All photos taken by myself at Reaseheath College.*

Plant identification was undertaken most weeks whereby we had to learn the names of fifteen new plants, which broadened my knowledge of quality plants that I can use when designing gardens. I also got the opportunity to make my first hanging basket which was not part of the syllabus! I particularly enjoyed propagating plant material using whip and tongue grafting, chip budding and side veneer grafting. Although to become proficient at these techniques would take many more hours practice, we were given a good introduction, and I have living proof that my whip and tongue grafts worked very well.



*Fig 2. Whip and tongue grafting of malus cultivars, Red Devil, Fiesta and Elstar*

The course gave me the opportunity to meet other enthusiasts and self employed people whom I could share ideas and planting techniques with. Since the course has finished I have used some of my free time to visit RHS and National Trust gardens of interest around the North West and Wales with people I have met on the course. It also enabled me to see different planting, maintenance and design techniques used by award-winning garden designers such as Arabella Lennox-Boyd at Gresgarth Hall Gardens.



*Fig 3. (L-R) At the edge of the shrub border in Bodnant Gardens, Conwy, and at Bluebell Cottage Garden, Cheshire.*



*Fig 4. (L-R) Papaver sp. in the kitchen garden at Gresgarth, Lancashire, and part of the Lanhydrock 'hot' garden at Wollerton Old Hall, Shropshire*

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to further my knowledge and skills in horticulture. I now plan to obtain my RHS Diploma by completing the RHS Level 3 Theory course, which complements the Level 3 Practical. I hope that this final qualification will put me ahead of other gardeners when applying for other horticulture jobs in the future.