

Calum Davidson

Plant Centre Assistant

The Alnwick Garden

I'm currently based in Northumberland at the Alnwick Gardens, I work between the nursery and Plant Centre, we propagate a good proportion of our own stock from the garden, grow it on in our own peat free mix, prepare it for sale and display it in our plant centre area of the gift shop. I started at Alnwick on the gardening team in the garden and learnt how the garden was run for 2 years, after which an opportunity came up to work in the Nursery and I jumped at the chance to learn more about plant identification and propagation techniques.

In February 2016 I applied to the PG Trust for help with costs for a training course in Garden Centre Management, course code BHT213, with online training provider ADL Academy for Distance Learning, it's a course you can do at your own pace but approximates 100 hours of study and in the end you get level 4 certificate in Garden Centre Management.

Fortunately I received a response from the Trust accepting my request, they explained the Royal Botanical and Horticultural Society of Manchester would contribute £250 of the £330 for the course.

The training comes in 12 Lessons

1. Introduction
2. Plant Health
3. Stock Maintenance
4. Display and Display Techniques
5. Garden Product Knowledge I
6. Garden Product Knowledge II
7. Indoor Plants
8. Container Stock
9. Seedlings, Bulbs, Herbs and Perennials.
10. Deciduous Trees, Fruit, Nuts, Berries. Seed.
11. Marketing
12. Management

So as you can see a pretty wide scope of topics to work through, as I had previous horticultural training in the past, some topics were good tools to reinforce some of that knowledge which to be honest, had become a tad rusty, touching up on nomenclature and plant health was a real benefit. On top of that new areas of learning were opened to me, such as developing a feel for stock maintenance, how to manage having too much or too little of a plant and what to do about it, as well as expanding my garden product knowledge, before now I hadn't put a great deal of thought into the benefits of various types of bench materials.

The course content is what I would expect for a certificate of this level, it introduces all aspects of Plant centre management with just enough detail to digest, so that when you enter a nursery or garden centre, you will be aware of whatever practices they use and proceed to expand on that knowledge as you go. The course is delivered as either entirely online, with a USB stick or in paper format, but the online classroom is available to everybody, here you have access to all the course content, assignment feedback and grade section as well as a personal tutor you can email at any time for assistance. My tutor was a gentleman named Andy, and he has been excellent, providing prompt feedback and advice on assignments if I was ever unsure. All of this suited me perfectly, I work full time, as well as buying a house and having a child this year, the freedom to work through at my own pace was very advantageous.

Doing this course alongside my work has benefited me in a few ways. Showing an interest in the subject really secured me the position in the nursery to begin with, helping getting a start in the direction of what I enjoy doing and making a living while doing it. It has helped boost my knowledge in my chosen area as well as horticulturally in general, making me a more confident gardener, getting asked gardening questions in the shop is a great way to boost knowledge. On top of that, I bring whatever topic I'm working on in with me, as in I ask questions or present ideas, some of which have been taken on board and are being used now, I feel this highlights my abilities and gives me a boost when it comes to future progression.

Many thanks for all the support

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