



## Professional Gardeners Trust Award Report

### Jennifer Quinlan

I work at the Welsh Mountain Zoo in Colwyn Bay, North Wales. I originally started my employment here as an Animal Keeper but after several years I decided I'd like a change so when an opportunity arose to join the gardening department, I jumped at it. I was pleased when my application was successful despite having no formal training in horticulture.

I am part of a team of four that are responsible for the maintenance of the whole grounds. The formal gardens include a large number of herbaceous beds, lawns and ponds. The animal enclosures require planting that reflects their natural habitat, which is often difficult to achieve in the North Wales climate and the woodland walk areas require constant monitoring and maintenance to ensure the safety of the visiting public. The work is always incredibly varied and at times can be very challenging.

Soon after starting in this new profession I realised there was much more to it than meets the eye and so I decided to learn more about it. I applied to study the RHS Level 2 in Horticulture at Reaseheath College in Nantwich, Cheshire. The course started in September 2016 through to June 2017 and consisted of both theory and practical units. In order to help cover the costs of the fees, I was awarded £750 from the Finnis Scott Foundation.

The course covered many areas of horticulture, from the basics of plant science and health through to propagation, garden design and growing fruit and veg. I particularly enjoyed the practical side of the course as it mirrored the theory and helped to reinforce what I was learning. Each student was given a plot (3m x 4m) to grow a number of different vegetable crops and then harvest at the end of the year. As a part of this the college holds an annual 'Potatofest' competition which is judged by professionals in the field. Each student was given a different variety of first early potato which they grew, harvested,



prepared and presented for the show. I was given the variety 'Maris Bard' and was very excited when it came to harvesting them. As this was my first foray into veg growing, I was curious as to what months of watering, feeding and weeding had done. I was very pleased to find a large crop of healthy (and tasty) looking potatoes. Picking the best of them, I carefully washed and cleaned them ready for the show. After waiting for the judges to inspect all 20 varieties on display I was very happy to be awarded with 2<sup>nd</sup> place and received a beautiful hanging basket as a prize.



The course was challenging at times, especially when trying to juggle it with working full time. However, as a whole it was fun, informative and extremely useful. It helped to increase my plant knowledge and understanding of working practices and I now no longer feel lost in the undergrowth within my professional working life. It has also helped to establish me in a career that I enjoy but I recognise that I have much more to learn and I intend to continue to do so whether that be at the zoo or another horticulture position.

I would like to thank the PG Trust for their support in aiding me to achieve my goals in this new career.