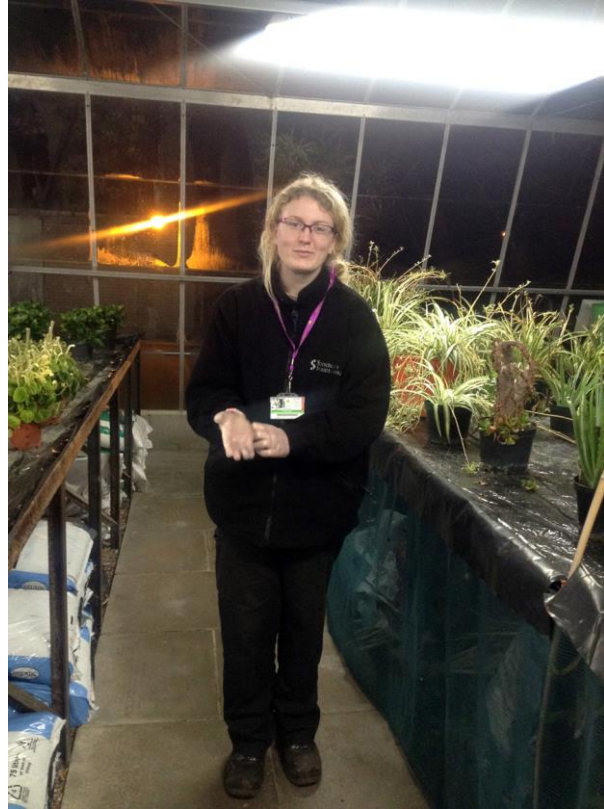


Name: Violet Gibbs

Location: Canterbury, Kent, SE UK

Current Work: Landscape Technician with Sanctuary Maintenance and Volunteer Beekeeper with Wildwood Conservation Park.



My job includes planting and maintaining gardens and green spaces, on housing estates and retirement areas. It includes garden maintenance such as mowing, strimming, hedge cutting, weeding and watering/feeding.

I applied for the RHS level 2 certificate in the principles of plant growth, propagation and development to help me better understand how to grow, maintain and properly care for individual plants as I felt this information was not covered in my apprenticeship that I took.

I live by myself and due to living on only an apprenticeship wage and saving up to learn to drive, I really had no money to spare for education and personal development so I applied for help from The Professional Gardeners Trust and was awarded £440 towards the cost of the RHS course, which came from the Perennial Lirion training fund. The training cost £550.

My course took place at Hadlow college in Canterbury and was on Tuesday evenings, from September 2016 through to June 2017. I enjoyed learning about the science behind plant growth. My apprenticeship course was at Pershore college in Worcester and was mostly tailored towards helping younger people to properly complete their coursework so I missed out on a lot of the interesting science that would have been of benefit.

The RHS course covered plant classification, structure and function, nutrition and the root environment, maintaining plant health and understanding plant propagation. Each unit was taught



via powerpoint with the internet, books, worksheets and physical examples. The course tutor Suzanne Patman was incredibly passionate and energetic and taught our small group with patience. She helped us all to understand, not just memorise the information and she made it fun to learn. I found the hours of the course (6pm until 9pm) convenient and was disappointed that the other RHS courses did not follow that lead this year as I would have liked to learn more. The facilities were great and I found the on site greenhouse particularly useful, we practised methods of propagation with different plants, some of which I still have and are growing really well! We took a trip to Mount Ephraim Gardens in Faversham, Kent which gave us real inspiration for how to keep a country garden.



My course included four exams, one for each unit- two in February 2017 and two in June 2017. The exams were based at Hadlow college.

The February exams I found testing- the RHS word many questions in confusing ways and I felt that I had to re-learn how to do an examination but I was overjoyed to achieve a pass with

commendation for both of the February exams. The June exams were less science based and relied more on the understanding of processes such as the process of creating a compost pile or the process of eliminating pests. I received a pass with commendation for one exam but unfortunately was four marks off a pass with commendation for the other exam, so it brought my overall grade down from a pass with commendation to a pass. I was happy that I passed the entire course but I was saddened that I missed a commendation by four marks!

The training I received has really changed my working practices- I now prune plants with more care and attention, and have helped my colleagues to care more. I have gained confidence from learning within a group and used this to deliver training within my workplace- helping my colleagues to identify and understand how to control invasive plant species.

My understanding of pesticides has improved as I recognise the process behind how they work, and I feel that my new knowledge and my pesticides licence equips me to control pests and weeds. I also enjoy being able to propagate plants more effectively and have created many copies of desirable house plants for the managers that I work with, and for my own garden.

I applied for a voluntary weekend position with an animal conservation charity as an assistant beekeeper and my improved knowledge of plants gained me the position, and has helped to create a great environment for bees and insects there. We are planning a wildflower area to teach local people about the importance of native wildflowers.

Since completing the course, I have gained full time employment with the company that I apprenticed with, and the job was given to me over another candidate, I strongly feel was due to my extra qualification. I have a plan in my head of what I wish to do now, while staying employed with my current company, I intend to complete the remaining level 2 RHS certificates to create a level 2 diploma before moving on to the RHS level 3's and maybe even the RHS Masters certificate in a few years time! I would also like to persuade my employers to put me through the level 3 of the Parks, Gardens and Green spaces, as I completed the level 2 for my apprenticeship. I was really inspired by my course tutor who showed me many programmes and internships that Kew Gardens offer, so I may divert my course if I find a programme that will suit me- Working in Kew gardens would be a dream!

The main reason for me applying for help from the professional gardeners trust was so that I could save money for driving lessons.

I took my theory test in August and passed and took my practical test on September 27<sup>th</sup> and can report that I failed but I have already rebooked!

Finally, I am thankful to The Professional Gardeners trust and to Perennial Lironi Training Fund for funding my course- as a young person that had very few great opportunities, I can honestly say this course has improved my life and my training has improved my career opportunities.