

## Worshipful Company of Gardeners Award Report

I received an award from the Worshipful Company of Gardeners of £300 towards the cost of my Pesticide Application Course - PA1 & PA6 (PA1- Principles of Safe Handling and Application of Pesticides and PA6 – Safe Application of Pesticides using Pedestrian Hand Held Equipment), which cost £350 in total. The course took place at The School of Horticulture at Kew Gardens and was arranged by the Surrey Horticultural Training Group and I attended for 4 days on Friday 6th October, Monday 16th October, Tuesday 17th October and Thursday 19th October 2017.

I am currently working as a full-time garden apprentice at Fulham Palace in London and am 9 months into an 18 month contract. I am a career changer having previously been a PA in a law firm and it was whilst working there that I started a RHS Level 2 qualification as I enjoyed gardening and wanted to learn more. As I went through the courses I grew increasingly interested in learning about horticulture and thought about the possibility of a career in it. Having passed my Level 2 exams I took the plunge and left my job to pursue a career in gardening. I started off by volunteering in a number of gardens including Kew, Chelsea Physic and Fulham Palace.

After half a year volunteering and further RHS learning I applied for and was accepted for an apprenticeship at Fulham Palace. It has been a fantastic experience so far and has involved such a wide range of horticultural experiences, such as preparing and growing vegetables and cut flowers in the walled garden, pruning, using horticultural machinery, lawn maintenance, establishing and maintaining meadows, maintaining herbaceous borders and general maintenance. I am looking forward to the large number of projects being carried out in the gardens as part of a HLF project. As part of my apprenticeship Fulham Palace have also given me the opportunity to study the Level 3 RHS qualification and attend practical courses.

As part of my ongoing training I was encouraged to attend the PA1 and 6 course as they are considered essential to future career development. The PA1 course is a foundation module and is theory based with a multiple choice computer based exam at the end. It covered aspects such as the relevant legislation regarding pesticide application including Codes of Practice, pesticide preparation, wearing the correct PPE, record keeping, environmental safety, how to interpret pesticides labels and how to apply, store, transport and dispose of pesticides safely.

It was a reassuring course to start with before embarking on the practical side as it gave a good background knowledge covering a wide range of topics. It was important to learn how to be safe around pesticides and also a real understanding of the best ways to have to limit the impact on the environment. The course was very thorough and let me feeling thoroughly prepared for the assessment.

The PA6 course was both a practical and theory course which built on the PA1 course. It was important again to be able to explain your obligations under the law and safety regulations. On the practical level we learnt the importance of assessing the site on which pesticides were to be applied for any environmental risks and how to minimize spray drift and what the best weather conditions are. As in PA1 it was essential to be able to interpret the pesticide label, explain how to deal with excess pesticide and containers and how to store it correctly. The practical element was particularly interesting as I had not used any such equipment and left me understanding the equipment and how to check it for damage, understanding the nozzles used, why they are used and in what circumstances.

We were taught how to calibrate the sprayer and perform the calculations to ensure we were using the correct amount of pesticide and water. These calibrations relied on accurate walking speeds and pumping rates which was a real art form and I have never concentrated on walking so much before. The trainer gave us plenty of opportunity to practice all elements of the practical which was so helpful in gaining confidence and ensured that we were carried out the application effectively. We were also made aware throughout the course the importance of handling the pesticides safely, using PPE and safe methods of working in particular when measuring out the pesticides and adding it to the applicator.

The assessment for PA6 was a detailed two hour exam involving questions regarding our understanding of legislation, safety, environmental awareness, correct PPE and equipment. We then went on to demonstrate practically how we calibrate and calculate the amount of pesticide and water for the area to be treated, how these are applied to pre checked equipment and then how to apply the pesticide to the area. We then completed the appropriate paperwork and explain what we would do with any leftover pesticide (dilute and concentrate) and packaging, how to clean up and store the equipment used. Whilst the practical exam was daunting it was a great way to demonstrate and go through the realities of using pesticides. The training has also assisted me with RHS Level 3 course where an understanding of pesticides and their use to prevent pests, diseases and weeds is a crucial element.

Whilst I have not to date applied any pesticides I will now be able to assist my current employer and any future employers where necessary in dealing with the ever greater number of pests and at present in particular the spike in box tree caterpillar. The training has given me the confidence to not only apply pesticides but to do so in a public space in a safe manner. In terms of my future many jobs require the PA1 and PA6 qualifications as standard.

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