

Professional Gardeners' Trust report – Bertie Smith

RBGE Herbology Certificate Jan-June 2019

I am currently a Gardens Team Leader for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust gardens in Stratford-upon-Avon, I've been working in Horticulture for over six years and have always had a keen passion for gardening. An area I've long been interested in is herbs and their uses, combined with how prominent herbal use was in Shakespeare's time and the fact we have a medicinal garden at work, I came across the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's Herbology Certificate course and knew it was the course for me! Without the help of the PG Trust giving me an award of £450 towards the course fees (which in total were £600), funded from a donation from the NGS, the National Garden Scheme of the Yellow Book of Open Gardens, I would not have been able to take part in such an insightful and useful course for which I cannot thank them enough for. I am also thankful for the support from my workplace for helping out with some of the travel and overnight accommodation which was necessary for me to be able to attend the course at RBGE.

The modules which the RBGE Herbology certificate cover are Physic Garden Horticulture, Humors, Herbaria & Theories on Theriaca, Medicine Wheel Garden Design, The Apothecary's Art, Bach Flower Remedies, Herbology Field Work, Glasshouse Botanicals Materia Medica, and Green Pharmacy Preparations. I covered these modules through attending the five weekend class sessions, and through my own research via a reading list, the eight study assignments, and when composing my Herbal Journal.

The weekend sessions were a mix of lectures, practicals (including balm making, theriaca making, flower infusions, and seed sowing to name a few!), botanising trips, and garden trips. Each time after I'd spent a weekend there, I had a head full of information and a packed book full of notes and flower pressings. I really enjoyed getting to learn about the plants which have extra medicinal or edible uses as well as their folklore and how I could relate this to my current job role with Shakespearean times.

This has been quite an intense course as I ended up most evenings and weekends were spent studying, researching, and writing the study assignments. It's been a bit tricky at times as my job is full-time and I've had to book approximately one day a month annual leave off to have more study time but I've honestly loved every moment of it!

It's been so fascinating and I feel I've grown a lot as a gardener, I am a lot more confident with my herb knowledge, I have gained multiple practical skills and botanising skills. I'm already making plans on how to improve the medicinal garden, which is based on the Four Humors, at work as well as being asked to deliver talks and articles on the subject of Herbology for colleagues and the public. I especially enjoyed doing the Medicine Wheel garden design project as I tried to incorporate numerous things I'd learnt on the course as well as including aspects which I felt were important like a Japanese zen garden for mindfulness, herbs based on the humors, and areas for wildlife.

I'd once again like to thank the PG Trust, the NGS, my workplace, and RBGE for such a wonderful, plant-filled experience. I'm already considering if I can do the RBGE Herbology Diploma to continue my knowledge and experience further as I have enjoyed it so much.



Botanising and inspecting Cymbalaria muralis (Ivy leaved toadflax)



Making my chosen herbal candy recipe at home ready to take to my RBGE course – crystalized stem ginger!



Flowers infusing in the sun collected from the RBGE gardens



Making Rose and Hawthorn syrup in class