



RHS Qualifications

RHS Level 3 Certificate in the Principles of Plant Growth, Garden Planning and Applied Propagation

Qualification Specification

From September 2026

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Section 1: About this Qualification

1.1 Aims and objectives of the qualification

This qualification is aimed at those progressing in horticultural roles or having a specialist personal interest in the supervision and development of gardens and landscapes.

The qualification provides underpinning knowledge and understanding of the principles of horticultural science and provides opportunities for learners to seek out best practice, and to develop an understanding of techniques which are cost effective, embrace sustainability, ensure biosecurity and comply with current legislation as they develop the gardens and landscapes under their care.

Progression from this qualification would be into employment or further training or education at level 4 and above.

1.2 Entry requirements

There are no pre-requisites for entry to this qualification.

1.3 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and Total Qualification Time (TQT)

The Guided Learning Hours (GLH) represent the time that the learner spends learning under the immediate guidance and supervision of a tutor. Guided Learning Hours are always less than total qualification time, as learners are expected to complete a certain amount of study in their own time. The Guided Learning Hours for this qualification is 120.

Total Qualification Time (TQT) includes the Guided Learning Hours and represents the notional time that an average learner could reasonably expect to take to complete the learning outcomes of the units to the standard determined by the assessment criteria and gain the qualification. It includes all face-to-face contact with tutors as well as assessment time and unsupervised directed study, coursework and practice. The Total Qualification Time for this qualification is 180.

1.4 Assessment methods

This qualification will be entirely assessed by two written examinations:

- The first examination covers Units 1-4
- The second examination covers Units 5-8

In each examination, all learning outcomes specified in the unit will be covered. Examinations must be taken with a provider approved by RHS Qualifications, or under arrangements for exceptional supervision agreed by RHS Qualifications.

All assessments must be conducted in accordance with the RHS requirements.

1.5 Grading

Both examinations carry equal marks. Learners must achieve at least 50% in each examination and must pass both examinations order to be awarded the qualification.

A final grade for the overall qualification will be calculated by amalgamating the marks for each examination and awarding this as an overall percentage.

Grades for the qualification will be awarded as follows:

50-64.9%	Pass
65-79.9%	Merit
80%+	Distinction

1.6 Learning Resources

There is a wide range of books, online material and other learning resources published which support the studies of those learning horticulture. RHS Qualifications does not recommend or endorse any specific learning resources as meeting the needs of learners studying for RHS qualifications. Learners are encouraged to seek guidance from their tutors on which learning resources will best support their studies, or to choose the most appropriate resources to support the qualification requirements and their needs from the wealth of material available.

1.7 Approved Centres

RHS Qualifications can only be delivered by approved centres. Further information regarding the approval process can be found at: rhs.org.uk/qualifications.

1.8 Learner Registration

All learners must be registered with RHS Qualifications at the commencement of this qualification through the RHS Qualifications Web Portal. More information about the registration process is available from RHS Qualifications.

1.9 Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration

RHS Qualifications is committed to ensuring fair assessment for all learners and will facilitate access to its qualifications through reasonable adjustments to assessment arrangements for learners with an identified specific need. An example of a reasonable adjustment which could be made is the provision of extra time in an examination, or the production of a modified examination paper for a learner with a visual impairment.

Special consideration is given following the examination to learners who are present for the examination but may have been disadvantaged by temporary illness, injury or adverse circumstances which arose at, or near, the time of examination.

Full guidance is provided in the document 'Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments Policy for Approved Centres' and 'Special Consideration Policy for Approved

Centres'. These documents are available on the RHS website (rhs.org.uk/qualifications), the RHS Qualifications Approved Centre web portal, or can be obtained from RHS Qualifications.

Applications for reasonable adjustments or special consideration must be made by the Approved Centre on behalf of the learner. Applications must be made within specified timescales.

1.10 Fees

For a full list of fees please see the RHS Qualifications Fees Notice. This document is available on the Qualifications page on the RHS website and on the RHS web portal. All fees are payable prior to confirmation of entry for any examination.

1.11 Late Entries

RHS Qualifications publishes annually, and distributes to Approved Providers, the closing dates of entry for each examination for the following year. **Late entries will not be accepted.**

1.12 Enquiry about Results service

An enquiry about results service is available from RHS Qualifications. Further information about this service is available on our website at rhs.org.uk/qualifications

1.13 Appeals

The appeals procedures are available on the RHS Qualifications web portal and on the RHS website rhs.org.uk/qualifications

1.14 Replacement Certificate (if lost, damaged or destroyed)

The fee for a replacement certificate can be found on the RHS Qualifications Fees Notice. Requests for a replacement certificate must be sent to the Qualifications Department.

1.15 Malpractice and Maladministration

RHS Qualifications does not tolerate actions or attempted actions of malpractice by learners or centres in connection with RHS qualifications. RHS Qualifications may impose penalties and/or sanctions on learners or centres where incidents, or attempted incidents, of malpractice have been proven.

A copy of the full policy is available on the RHS Qualifications web portal and on the RHS website rhs.org.uk/qualifications

Section 2: Unit specifications

2.1 Unit List

1.	Horticultural Heritage
2.	Plant knowledge
3.	Plant selection and cultivation
4.	Managing plant propagation
5.	Garden styles and Specialist Areas
6.	Productive growing
7.	Gardens management
8.	Gardens, people and spaces

2.2 How to read the unit specification

Each unit has the same format. This is as follows:

Unit aim	Sets out the aim of the unit and summarises the learning and assessment within it.
Learning outcome	The learning outcome sets out what a learner must know or be able to do. The learning outcome is a broad statement capturing the overall learning for that outcome.
Assessment criteria	The assessment criteria set out what the learner can demonstrate to show that they have met the requirements for assessment. Each criterion includes a command verb which sets the level of demand and depth of knowledge and understanding required.

2.3 Definition of command verbs

The following list provides a definition of the command verbs used in the specification to provide more detail about the level of demand and depth of knowledge and understanding expected. These command verbs should be read in the context of the level descriptor for this qualification, which appears before the list of command verbs.

Further information about level descriptors for the Regulated Qualifications Framework can be found in the Ofqual Handbook [here](#)

Level descriptor for Level 3

	The learner....	The learner can....
Level 3	Has factual, procedural and theoretical knowledge and understanding of a subject or field of work to complete tasks and address problems that while well-defined, may be complex and non-routine. Can interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas. Is aware of the nature of the area of study or work. Is aware of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.	Identify, select and use appropriate cognitive and practical skills, methods and procedures to address problems that while well-defined, may be complex and non-routine. Use appropriate investigation to inform actions. Review how effective methods and actions have been.

Command verbs used in this specification

Command verb	Use at Level 3	Examples
Describe	Provide a description of well-defined but complex contexts, situations or facts	Describe how.... Describe the role of.... Describe the impact of....
Evaluate	Judge, assess or calculate the quality, importance or value of something	Evaluate the key elements of.... Evaluate the impact and importance of.....
Explain	Provide an explanation of well-defined but complex facts, procedures or processes	Explain why.... Explain how.... Explain the importance of....
Identify	Be able to name or know the meaning of well-defined but complex or non routine terminology, application of terms, concepts, processes, procedures or tasks.	Identify a garden style (from given features).... Identify reliable sources of information.... Identify types of plant information....

Unit 1 – Horticultural Heritage

Unit aim

This unit provides learners with the opportunity to investigate the key periods of history with relation to garden design including the principle design features for each period and an awareness of the key influences on the development of gardens including politics, exploration and trade, colonisation and development of empire, and the assimilation of gardening styles from different cultures.

Learners have opportunities to explore the value of horticultural heritage to society, including the economic benefits, the role of heritage gardens and designed landscapes in conservation, along with the models and techniques that are used to evaluate these concepts.

Learners will also be aware of the impact of horticultural heritage on the management of gardens and designed landscapes informs many of the decisions required in the care of these important spaces. This includes aspects such as statements of significance, prioritisation of works and spirit of place.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand the history of horticultural space

Assessment criteria

1.1 Evaluate the key elements of historic horticultural spaces from the 14th to 21st Centuries history including:

Medieval Gardens – key features include:

- Enclosures: Wattle fences, *thorn* hedges.
- Structures: Trellis arbours, covered walkways (linking buildings).
- Planting: Grass as "flowery meads" with wildflowers, herbs for scent/medicine.
- Features: Turf seats, simple water features.

Tudor, Elizabethan and Stuart Gardens – key features include:

- Layout: Strict geometry, symmetry, parterres (patterns viewed from above).
- Features: Long tree avenues, formal watercourses, statues, mounts (small hills).
- Materials: Stone, formal terraces.
- Influence: Italian/French/Dutch styles, reflecting power.

English landscape gardens – key features include:

- Picturesque features: Wild, naturalistic landscapes and rugged elements
- Structures: Grottoes, temples and follies
- Features: Lakes and trees (clumping and natural placing)
- Influence: the natural vista including the use of ha has and other retaining features
- Plants: Introduction of exotic species e.g. *Rhododendron ponticum*, specimen tree planting (e.g. *Cedrus libani*)

Victorian Gardens

- Features: Grottoes, ornate fountains (surprise elements), birdbaths, sundials.
- Containers: Ornate urns, decorative planters for exotic plants.
- Plants: Introduction of new exotic species, specialised collections e.g. Pteridomania (fern fever).
- Structure: Walled gardens for growing food/rare plants, creating distinct zones.

1.2 Explain the role and purpose of historical horticultural spaces, to include:

- conservation collections
- private gardens (both privately owned and open to the public)
- urban green spaces

1.3 Evaluate the impact and importance of the introduction of plant species, to include:

The impact on Horticultural Diversity and Design such as:

- Vastly expanded plant palette
- Shaping of garden styles
- Innovation in cultivation e.g. development of glasshouses and heating systems
- Invasive species e.g. the introduction of species such as *Reynoutria japonica*
- Ethical considerations e.g. the impact on habitats and people in host countries

The importance and value of new plant species such as:

- Cultural and historical links e.g. to plant hunters, colonial connections, development of specific horticultural practices
- Economic importance – e.g. the impact on the ornamental plant trade
- Genetic resource and conservation – e.g. genetic diversity of plant species

Learning outcome 2 – Understand the key influences on the development of horticultural space

Assessment criteria

2.1 Evaluate the key influences in the development of horticultural spaces, to include:

- Politics, society, and common values
 - Use of gardens to denote wealth and status
 - The creation of municipal parks in the 19th century
 - Growing vegetables in gardens during the second world war to combat rationing
 - The promotion of native plants for biosecurity
 - The development of "rewilded" spaces to enhance biodiversity and environmental consciousness
- Exploration and trade:
 - European expansion and trade as drivers of plant dispersal
 - Global exchange of plants in the 19th and early 20th centuries
- Colonialisation and the development of empire
 - establishment of botanical gardens in colonies
- Assimilation of gardening styles from different cultures
- Art and architectural styles:
 - French Baroque style reflecting the power and order of the monarchy
 - Picturesque movement linked to Romantic art
 - Incorporation of architectural elements
 - Modern garden design influenced by movements like modernism and post-modernism.

2.2 Identify a garden style from the use of planting and design characteristics, to include:

Italian/Dutch/French formal gardens:

- Design: strict symmetry, straight paths, right angles, and a clear, geometric floor plan, terraced slopes, raised beds.
- Planting: tightly clipped evergreen hedges and trees (often monocultures) in formal, straight lines, topiary, and intricate knot gardens.
- Features: Geometric water features with stone surrounds and vertical sides, fountains, and classical statues or temples are used as focal points.

Victorian Gardens:

- Design: order and symmetry combined with romantic aspects such as winding paths in larger estates. Introduction of lawns with invention of the lawnmower.
- Planting: Highly ornamental, with vibrant, structured flower beds and the use of "bedding out" (seasonal replacement of plants like *Pelargonium*, *Fuchsia* and *Begonia*).

Informal and Naturalistic Styles:

- Emulating or working with natural landscapes, often with asymmetry and a rejection of rigid formality.

English Landscape Gardens (Georgian):

- Design: embracing asymmetry and natural landforms. Key elements include rolling parkland, serpentine lakes, curving paths, and open views (e.g. use of a ha-ha).
- Planting: Naturalistic planting with loose groves or clumps of trees, and grass right up to the house. Clipped plants rejected in favour of natural growth.

Arts and Crafts:

- Ethos: reaction against industrialisation, promoting craftsmanship, beauty, simplicity and closer connections between people, nature and place.
- Design: garden rooms, pergolas, terraces, paths, walls and local materials to link house and landscape.
- Planting: Planting combined herbaceous borders, roses, climbers and topiary, favouring seasonal colour, texture, informality and naturalistic effects.

2.3 Explain the importance of communities of practice, specialist societies and the sharing of information and approaches to include:

- Historic garden specialist horticulturalists and heritage organisations.
- Private landscape and garden trusts (e.g. Painshill, Chiswick House and Gardens etc.)
- Specialist societies include heritage organisations such as:
 - The Gardens Trust
 - The National Trust
 - The Royal Horticultural Society
 - Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
 - English Heritage
 - Historic Houses Association

Learning outcome 3 – Understand the importance of horticultural heritage

Assessment criteria

3.1 Explain the value of horticultural heritage to society, to include:

- Economic benefits such as:
 - Tourism and jobs
 - Local food systems
 - Property value
- Conservation and environment such as:
 - Biodiversity
 - Ecosystem services
 - Sustainable practices
- National identity and culture such as
 - Symbolism
 - Sense of place
 - Cultural continuity
- Community and wellbeing such as:
 - Social cohesion
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Education
- Storytelling and memory such as:
 - Narrative power
 - Connecting generations
 - Meaning-making (the process by which people interpret experiences, places, objects, events, or information and assign significance, value, or understanding to them)

3.2 Explain how to evaluate heritage on a site, to include:

- The use of historical records: archives, maps, and written records to trace the site's development.
- Existing surveys: consulting local Historic Environment Records (HERs).
- Site visits: detailed visual inspections to understand condition.
- Photography and drawing: details, dimensions, and spatial layouts (plans, elevations).
- Analysis of site elements: examining materials and construction techniques.

3.3 Explain the role of interpretation in engaging visitors to heritage gardens to include:

- How understanding the history and context of a site can encourage visitors to engage with its historical significance
- The role of storytelling in bringing the history of the site to life

- Links to key historical events and people can provide a context and personal dimension to the site

Learning outcome 4: Understand the impact of horticultural heritage on garden management

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the principles of conservation theory, to include:

- Significance
- Prioritisation of works
- The use of Conservation Management Plans (CMPs)
- Spirit of place
- Legislative frameworks including:
 - Historic England -The National Heritage List for England which includes Registered Parks and Gardens.
 - the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
 - The Environment Act 2021
 - The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

4.2 Explain how conservation theory applies to horticultural spaces, to include:

- Balancing preservation with modern needs
- Respect for the spirit of place
- Ensuring long-term stewardship
- Focusing on positive management of change rather than resisting it

Unit 2 – Plant Knowledge

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore plant exploration and collecting in both historic gardens and landscapes, and current practice. They will develop skills in research to inform plant husbandry including assessing the reliability of information sources, along with a knowledge of international standards of plant nomenclature.

This unit covers areas of research that include; origin and natural habitat, folklore and use in medicine, biodiversity ratings and conservation status. From this research, learners will be able to apply this information to the selection of species, the management of living collections and horticultural interpretation.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand the role of exploration on plant diversity

Assessment criteria

1.1 Explain the process of plant introductions to British gardens from the 16th to 21st centuries to include:

- Notable individuals involved in plant exploration e.g. Sir Joseph Banks, George Forrest, Frank Kingdon-Ward, Ernest Wilson, Marianne North
- How plant exploration resulted in the transformation of Landscapes and increased the diversity in British gardens
- The social significance of plant exploration and the introduction of exotic plants as way of displaying wealth, knowledge, and enlightened taste
- The growth of commercial nurseries
- Impact of plant introductions e.g. plants introduced by the Romans on the range of plants grown in gardens today

1.2 Describe the advantages of wild collected plant material as opposed to cultivated varieties, including:

- Genetic Diversity
- Resilience
- Conservation

1.3 Explain the regulatory and ethical implications of the collection of plant material from the wild

Regulatory Frameworks

- Control of collection
- Landowner permission
- Protected areas
- Protected species

- International conventions including the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)*, *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)* & *Nagoya Protocol*

Ethical implications

- Sustainability
- Minimising harm
- Respect for traditional knowledge

1.4 Explain the impacts on wild plant collection and biodiversity

Learners will explain the impacts, both positive and negative on biodiversity of the collection of plants from the wild, including:

Negative impacts

- Ecosystem degradation e.g. Victorian fashion for ferns
- Disruption of local ecology e.g. exploitation of Turkey for *Cyclamen* spp and exploitation of orchids, cacti, bulbs and tree ferns
- Overharvesting and depletion
- Loss of Genetic Diversity

Positive impacts

- Sustainable practices
- Economic incentives for conservation
- Knowledge transfer

Learning outcome 2 – Understand plant information sources

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify reliable sources of information about plants, to include:

- Academic sources including databases and digital libraries
- Experience-based and community sources
- Online communities and forums

2.2 Describe the role of organisations involved in researching, curating and disseminating information relating to plants, e.g.:

- The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)
- The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew
- Plant Heritage
- UK Plant Health Information Portal
- Specialist Plant Societies, for example, the Alpine Garden Society
- The International Dendrology Society (Trees and Shrubs Online)
- Plant Network

2.3 Describe the role of nomenclature standards and type specimens in plant taxonomy, to include:

Role of nomenclature standards:

- Uniqueness and universality
- Stability
- Authority

Role of type specimens:

- Permanent reference
- Reduces ambiguity
- Foundation for taxonomy

2.4 Explain the roles of the RHS Plant Finder (and RHS Plant Database):

- UK directory for gardeners and industry to find plant availability
- An International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA)
- Links to the RHS's living collections and specimen database

2.5 Identify the methodologies used to describe the properties of plants, to include:

- The use of trials and research to inform the properties of plants including health, performance and weather resistance
- The use of ecosystem services to link specific plant traits to the benefits that humans derive from ecosystems
- The use of plant hardiness ratings to assess the lowest temperature a plant is likely to withstand
- The use of colour charts to distinguish between different plant varieties where slight colour variations are significant.
- The use of award schemes e.g. RHS Award of Garden Merit to highlight innovation to long-term performance.

Learning outcome 3 – Applied plant knowledge

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify types of plant information and how these are communicated, including:

- botanical description
- origin, natural habitat geographic spread
- folklore/medicinal uses
- natural method of propagation
- biodiversity rating
- conservation status
- predictive nature of scientific names
- advantages of scientific names

3.2 Identify the horticultural applications of plant information for:

- species selection
- plant management
- interpretation
- botanical plant descriptions

3.3 Explain the importance of taxonomic principles in the management of plant collection to include:

Taxonomic principles:

- Identifying, describing, naming (nomenclature), and classifying plants into a hierarchical system (Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species) based on shared characteristics.

The importance of using taxonomic principles:

- Transparency in use of nomenclature for identification
- Shared practice in plant identification

Practical applications to include:

- The management of National Plant Collections ®
- Labelling and verification

3.4 Explain the impact of plant knowledge on the propagation of plant species, to include:

- Selection of methods for propagation (sexual and asexual)
- Optimising environmental conditions
- Moisture and humidity
- Temperature and light
- Growing medium
- Timing and aftercare

3.5 Describe how plant knowledge can be applied to management techniques, to include:

- Specific practices e.g. physical manipulation (pruning, manual thinning), chemical manipulation (using hormones), and targeted planting strategies
- Conservation and restoration

Learning outcome 4 – Understanding how to manage plants within botanic and other gardens

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the concept of living collections

4.2 Describe the role and benefits of plant records, to include:

- Taxonomy and nomenclature
- Location and mapping
- Provenance
- Horticultural history
- Health and condition
- Phenology

4.3 Explain the advantages and disadvantages of Plant Records, to include:

Advantages

- Informed management and planning
- Conservation and biodiversity
- Research and education
- Collaboration and data sharing
- Accountability and legal compliance
- Historical archive
- Increased efficiency and value

Disadvantages

- Data quality and management issues
- Resource challenges

4.4 Describe the information contained in plant records, to include:

- Taxonomic information
- Accession data
- Provenance/source
- Location
- Quantity and condition
- Horticultural notes
- Legal/administrative data

4.5 Describe how digital tools are used to manage plant records

4.6 Evaluate the value of plant and historical records, to include:

Value and importance of plant records

- Biodiversity and conservation records
- Climate change research
- Ecological understanding
- Agriculture and horticulture

Value and importance of historical records

- Cultural heritage
- Understanding past landscapes
- Planning for future change

Unit 3 – Plant Selection and Cultivation

Unit aim

In this unit learners will explore the function and role that plants play within a garden, understanding how the specification of plant material is critical to the ultimate quality of plantings. Learners will understand how to use technical language and apply a range of criteria to inform the specification of plants for planting. Learners will explore how plant-based design principles support the selection of combinations of plants to create gardens and designed landscapes.

Learners will also understand how to select plant species to fulfil a function within a garden or designed landscape. This includes the specification of plant material and the combination of plants to create a garden.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand how to select plants for a purpose

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify the characteristics of plants for use in a range of purposes, to include:

- structural
- productive
- climate resilience
- ecosystem services including the provision of habitat and food
- focal points
- aesthetics
- specialist / themed areas

1.2 Describe how to select plants for use in heritage sites, to include:

- suitability to era
- historic links to site

Learning outcome 2 – Understand how to procure plants

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify and apply terminology used in plant specifications, to include:

Tree sizes:

- unfeathered maiden (whip)
- feathered maiden
- standard
- heavy standard

Production systems:

- bare root
- rootball
- undercut
- airpots
- containerised
- container grown

Sustainability:

- locally grown, reduced emissions in transport
- single use plastic
- growing media
- water footprint
- ethics e.g. Modern Slavery Act

Biosecurity:

- policies
- supplier reputation
- compliance with phytosanitary controls / legislation

Procurement:

- lead times/delivery
- local production
- minimum order quantities

2.2 Describe formal standards, to include the concept of British Standards.

2.3 Explain the importance of best practice including fact-based decision making for specifying plants for planting.

Learning outcome 3 – Understand how to combine plants

Assessment criteria

3.1 Explain the impact of design principles on the combination of plant species, to include:

- texture
- proportion
- scale
- colour
- unity
- harmony
- balance
- rhythm
- repetition

3.2 Explain how design principles are applied in the work of prominent designers, to include:

- Contemporary designers e.g. Nigel Dunnett, Tom Stuart-Smith, Sarah Eberle, Piet Oudolf
- Historical designers e.g. Capability Brown, Humphrey Repton, Gertrude Jekyll

3.3 Explain the impacts of heritage on design, to include:

- Style and aesthetics
- Materials and features
- Plant selection
- Cultural and political context
- Conservation and restoration
- Sustainability

Learning outcome 4 – Understand how to plan plant maintenance

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the cultivation requirements of a range of plants within types of planting, e.g. lawns, wildflower meadows, hedges, ornamental shrubs, herbaceous borders, fruit trees

4.2 Explain the impact of cultivation requirements on staff resources and the development of maintenance schedules, including:

- Number of staff needed to carry out maintenance
- Specialised skills and training needs for maintenance tasks
- Resource allocation for specific maintenance tasks
- Frequency and timing of maintenance tasks
- Scope of maintenance tasks required
- Documentation and compliance requirements

4.3 Explain the importance of best practice and fact-based decision making when developing maintenance schedules

Unit 4 – Managing Plant Propagation

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will develop an understanding of the management of plant propagation operations, including propagation facilities, planning processes, propagation techniques, and the development of propagation protocols. Learners will explore the effective use of propagation facilities and examine how specialist techniques, research, and development can be applied to maximise the value of investment in plants for planting schemes, heritage landscapes, plant collections, and commercial stock production.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand the effective use of propagation facilities

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe the facilities and equipment required in a seed and vegetative propagation unit, to include:

- structures
- benching
- environmental monitoring and control equipment and systems
- materials storage

1.2 Describe the factors to consider when selecting equipment for propagation facilities and how these influence the layout of propagation facilities to maximise efficient working, to include:

- structures
- benching
- environmental monitoring and control equipment and systems
- renewable energy sources
- the storage of materials

1.3 Explain how the requirements for propagation will be influenced by the choice of plant species.

1.4 Explain how horticultural research findings can inform the decision-making process when establishing propagation facilities.

Learning outcome 2 – Understand how to plan propagation

Assessment criteria

2.1 Describe the components of an annual propagation plan, and how these are used to create plans, to include:

- stock plant management
- capacity
- timings of operations
- germination times
- rooting times
- resource requirements
- labour requirements
- techniques to be used
- pest and disease control and hygiene

2.2 Describe how the propagation facility is used to meet plant procurement requirements, including the production of hard to source heritage-based plant material.

Learning outcome 3 – Understand advanced propagation techniques

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe the specialist seed propagation techniques used to overcome dormancy mechanisms, to include:

- scarification
- stratification
- gibberellin soaks

3.2 Describe propagation techniques relevant to the management of plant collections, to include:

- seed collection
- layering
- bulb and corm propagation
- grafting

3.3 Describe the advantages of:

- clonal selection
- micropropagation

3.4 Describe the impacts of the following factors when propagating plant material:

- growing media
- modules
- rooting treatments
- nutrition
- temperature
- relative humidity

Learning outcome 4 – Understand the development of propagation protocols

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the use of propagation protocols to reliably produce plants that require specialist techniques, to include:

- Grafting/budding
- Micropropagation
- Layering
- Seed propagation

Protocol requirements include:

- Sterilisation
- Environmental control
- Timing
- Monitoring and aftercare

4.2 Identify the factors that inform the development of propagation protocols, including:

- Key criteria
- Key performance indicators

4.3 Describe how data can be used to measure the effectiveness of protocols and outcomes including:

- percentage germination
- percentage rooting

4.4 Describe how to develop protocols for the propagation of different genera including:

- Seed sowing
- Cuttings
- Layering
- Grafting/budding
- Micropropagation

4.5 Explain how fact-based decision making and best practice inform the process of propagation, with reference to the role of:

- Professional bodies e.g. The International Plant Production Society (IPPS)
- Conferences and symposia

Unit 5 – Garden Styles and Specialist Areas

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will understand how to determine and work with a number of different design styles. They will explore how garden styles are created in part by the selection and style of plantings and how the gardens created can benefit the wildlife and biodiversity, along with the mental health and wellbeing of garden visitors.

Learners will also understand how hard landscaping materials, including paths, benches and plant supports contribute to the design style and planting to create ambience. Learners will explore how the use of trees influence garden style whilst providing a range of functions for both the environment and visitors.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand Garden styles and areas

Assessment criteria

1.1 Use design criteria to identify garden styles and areas including:

- formal gardens
- woodland gardens
- cottage gardens
- modernist gardens
- coastal gardens
- prairie gardens
- ecological gardens
- alpine and rock gardens
- water gardens
- display glasshouses

1.2 Describe the impact of garden styles on:

- Visitors
- Maintenance schedules
- Garden management plans

1.3 Describe how changing climate condition impacts garden styles including the impact on:

- Plant selection
- Resilience of plants to wind, drought, floods and high temperatures

Learning outcome 2 – Understand planting styles

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify suitable plant species for planting styles, to include:

- formal gardens
- woodland gardens
- cottage gardens
- modernist gardens
- coastal gardens
- prairie plantings
- ecological plantings
- alpine and rock gardens
- water gardens
- display glasshouses

2.2 Describe the benefits of a range of planting styles and areas on wellbeing and biodiversity, to include:

- formal gardens
- woodland gardens
- cottage gardens
- modernist gardens
- coastal gardens
- prairie plantings
- ecological plantings
- alpine and rock gardens
- water gardens
- display glasshouses

2.3 Evaluate the impact of planting styles on the development of maintenance schedules and garden management plans.

Learning outcome 3 – Understand hard landscaping elements

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify hard landscaping characteristics for a range of garden styles and areas, to include:

- formal gardens
- woodland gardens
- cottage gardens
- modernist gardens
- coastal gardens
- ecological gardens
- alpine and rock gardens
- water gardens
- display glasshouses

3.2 Describe the sustainable implications of hard landscape material choices including:

- Procurement decisions
- Benefits and limitations of recycled and repurposed materials

3.3 Explain the impact of hard landscaping features on visitor flow through a garden e.g. directing and restricting movement of visitors.

Learning outcome 4 – Understand tree management

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the role of trees within a range of garden styles and areas to include:

- formal gardens
- woodland gardens
- cottage gardens
- modernist gardens
- coastal gardens
- ecological
- alpine and rock gardens.

4.2 Describe the influence of garden styles and areas on tree maintenance, to include:

- inspection
- pruning
- crown raising
- pest, disease and pathogen
- legislation

4.3 Explain the impacts of trees on neighbouring garden areas such as productive growing areas.

4.4 Explain the impacts of trees on garden visitors e.g. the provision of shade, the filtering of rain.

Unit 6 – Productive Growing

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore the role of productive growing within a garden setting which involves the cultivation of fruit, vegetables and flowers for cutting. Learners will understand how productive growing involves careful planning and scheduling of crops for continuity of supply. It also involves the selection and implementation of cropping systems and approaches.

Learners will also understand how successful productive growing includes a number of key elements, for example, optimising soil fertility, the management of weeds and other unwanted plants, along with the application of best practice and sustainability. They will consider how to use the latest findings from horticultural research and development. This research informs the selection of crops, cultivars, and husbandry decisions.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand growing systems

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify systems used in productive growing, including:

- certified organic production
- hydroponics
- aquaponics
- minimal cultivation
- raised beds
- traditional gardening
- square foot gardening

1.2 Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the following growing systems:

- certified organic production
- minimal cultivation
- raised beds
- traditional gardening
- square foot gardening

1.3 Describe how growing systems can be integrated into the wider management of garden areas.

1.4 Explain how productive gardens can inspire garden visitors to cultivate their own gardens.

Learning outcome 2 – Understand how to select and plan crops

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify the criteria for the selection of crops to be grown to include cultivar selection, to include:

- Site conditions
- Yield
- Pest and disease resistance
- What people want to eat
- RHS AGM

2.2 Describe factors to consider when planning a cropping schedule for a productive garden, to include:

- space available
- crop rotations
- continuity of supply

2.3 Explain the impact of perennial crops on space availability and the efficacy of crop rotations.

2.4 Describe how protective structures are used e.g. cloches or fleece, for early and late cropping.

2.5 Explain how to plan the cropping schedule for a standard allotment to meet objectives, to include:

- Continuity of supply for both fresh and stored produce, including cultivar selection, successional sowing and intercropping.
- Maintaining soil health and fertility through methods such as:
- Crop rotation - including traditional methods such as brassica, potatoes, roots, legumes, and variations including the use of green manures.

2.6 Describe the impact of crop selection on community and visitor engagement.

2.7 Describe how volunteer gardeners assist in the production of crops.

2.8 Explain how to set standards for productive growing settings, to include:

- Cultivation techniques
- Addition of bulky organic material
- Methods of sowing
- Crop spacing
- Aftercare e.g. thinning, weed control

Learning outcome 3 – Understand how to optimise yield

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe ways to optimise yield, including:

- Soil amelioration
- Weed control strategies
- Irrigation strategies

3.2 Explain the implication of weed control measures on sustainability. e.g. the use of hot foam.

3.3 Describe the impact of:

- Sowing
- Planting densities
- Intercropping

3.4 Explain the advantages and limitations of different techniques to increase soil fertility.

3.5 Describe the suitability of weed control strategies for:

- Ephemeral weeds
- annual weeds
- perennial weeds

3.6 Describe the application of soil improvement and weed control strategies in the development of maintenance schedules and garden management plans for other garden areas.

Learning outcome 4 – Understand research and development in productive growing

Assessment criteria

4.1 Explain how key sources of research and information on productive growing are applied to crop selection and cultivation practices.

Sources of research include:

- National Institute of Agricultural Botany
- ADAS Horticulture
- Garden Organic
- Government statistics and data
- Scientific journals
- Academic databases

4.2 Evaluate the importance of horticultural research and development to inform the development of garden areas along with the production of maintenance plans and schedules.

Unit 7 – Gardens Management

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore the ways in which gardens are maintained and managed. They will understand how to ensure that maintenance is carried out in an appropriate and sustainable manner. This process includes the recruitment, induction and training of staff, the development of maintenance schedules and the management of health and safety.

They will also understand how to devise, implement and manage projects within gardens.

Learners will understand how to set standards, and use IT to develop and implement maintenance schedules and garden management plans.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand how to manage people in a garden

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe factors that relate to managing people, to include:

- clear job roles
- recruitment
- induction
- training
- motivation
- feedback

1.2 Describe how key organisational policies and procedures are used to support the management of people, including those covering:

- Recruitment
- Induction
- Job descriptions
- Training
- Equality and Diversity
- Grievance
- Disciplinary
- Performance management

1.3 Evaluate how effective management influences the development of gardens, maintenance standards and visitor interactions.

Learning outcome 2 – Understand how to manage material resources in a garden

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify types of material resources within a garden, to include:

Built environment:

- buildings
- paths
- mains services.

Tools and equipment:

- hand tools
- powered tools
- machinery
- IT.

2.2 Describe methods for managing resources in a garden, to include the use of:

- garden maintenance plans/schedules
- Information management and the use of IT
- operating procedures
- user manuals

2.3 Describe the implications of poor resource management

2.4 Explain how garden management plans are used to identify, allocate and justify additional resources.

Learning outcome 3 – Understand how to plan projects and maintenance activities

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe the key principles of project management and the main stages of a project, to include:

- **Initiation** - define the business case, objectives, and scope. A project plan is created, outlining goals, stakeholders, and justification.
- **Planning** - develop a detailed plan, including tasks, timelines (schedules), budgets, resources, and communication plans. Use of key tools: e.g. Gantt charts, SMART goals, work breakdown structure.
- **Execution** - the work is performed by the team, building the project's deliverables. Includes recording task completion, team coordination, resource allocation.
- **Monitoring and control** - track progress against the plan, manage risks, and make necessary adjustments to keep the project on schedule and budget. Use of metrics e.g. KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)
- **Closure** - formally conclude the project, deliver final products, get approvals, document lessons learned, and release resources.

3.2 Explain how project management tools are used in the maintenance and development of horticultural sites, to include:

- Gantt charts
- SMART goals
- Work breakdown structure

3.3 Describe the role of owners, stakeholders and professionals in the development of a horticultural site, to include:

- permissions
- approvals
- workflows
- budgets
- specifications
- professional boundaries
- definitions
- conflict resolution.

3.4 Describe the key components of maintenance schedules, to include:

- objectives
- frequency
- technique
- timings

3.5 Describe the key components of garden management plans, to include:

- site objectives
- history and significance
- site survey results
- audience and visitor management
- project delivery / operational plans
- records of plant collections.

3.6 Explain how garden management plans set and ensure the maintenance standards for a range of garden styles and areas.

Learning outcome 4 – Understand maintenance standards

Assessment criteria

4.1 Explain how Garden Management Plans are used to set standards, including:

- How garden managers are responsible for setting their own standards.
- That garden managers will set differing standards depending on function, design and client expectations.
- The use of method statements.
- The use of formal quality standards e.g. contract specifications, British Standards Institute.
- How garden managers can work to standards and specifications without the need for formal contracts.
- How garden managers can benchmark their standards with other gardens .

4.2 Describe how standards and specifications impact the development of garden management plans e.g. mowing frequency, permissible extension growth on hedges.

4.3 Describe how standards are monitored, including:

- The checks that are made to ensure formal quality standards have been met, and that method statements have been applied
- The benefits of benchmarking
- The role of visitor feedback in the setting and monitoring of standards

Unit 8 – Gardens, People and Spaces

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore the role of gardens as visitor attractions. They will understand how gardens are judged on the quality of their pre-arrival information, the arrival experience, the experience of wandering through plantings and garden areas, the customer care offered by team members along with the quality, range and diversity of events and exhibitions.

Learners will understand that horticulturists who manage gardens will often work on a variety of projects to engage their communities within the garden under their care, including involving communities adopting areas of gardens, volunteering and the development of school gardens.

Learners will also explore how gardens and gardening impact on wellbeing and the role of gardens as places of nature-based therapy.

Learners will understand the importance of using feedback from a range of stakeholders to improve standards.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand the relationship between gardens and visitors

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify the key aspects of the visitor experience, to include:

- pre-visit information
- arrival experience
- visitor flow through the garden
- customer care
- garden events and exhibitions
- quality of the experience.

1.2 Explain how criteria can be used to monitor the effectiveness of the visitor experience including:

- Customer feedback
- Visitor numbers
- Engagement with social media or other forms of marketing/advertising

1.3 Explain how key factors contribute to visitor experiences, including:

- spirit of place
- cohesion
- engagement
- mission and shared values

Learning outcome 2 – Understand gardens and their communities

Assessment criteria

2.1 Describe the benefits of community engagement with gardens, to include:

- greater range of perspectives
- shared ownership
- raising the profile of gardens and horticulture

2.2 Identify the techniques used to engage local communities with gardens, to include:

- consultations
- events
- community groups
- community spaces
- social media

2.3 Evaluate the value of community engagement in the development of garden management plans and specialist areas.

Learning outcome 3 – Understand how green space impacts wellbeing

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe the impacts of engaging with green space on wellbeing, to include:

- reduced morbidity
- psychological relaxation
- stress alleviation
- physical activity
- noise and pollution reduction

3.2 Describe a range of horticultural interventions that can enhance wellbeing, including:

- The use of social prescribing
- Horticultural therapy

3.3 Describe the benefits of horticultural interventions on wellbeing, to include:

- improved concentration
- mental stimulation
- increased self esteem
- healthy patterns of social functioning
- fitness
- improved motor skills

3.4 Explain how the design and development of garden spaces can influence health and wellbeing, to include:

- the design of specialist areas, e.g. sensory gardens
- the role of volunteering
- social inclusion

Learning outcome 4 – Understand the role of feedback and evaluation

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the role and importance of feedback, including:

- The use and importance of formal and informal sources of feedback
- How feedback is used and implemented
- How communication with stakeholders influences the type and quality of feedback

4.2 Explain techniques to collect feedback from visitors and stakeholders, including:

- Surveys
- Informal feedback collection
- Use of social media
- Formal feedback collection

4.3 Explain the value of using benchmarking data with other gardens to evaluate the visitor experience, including the comparison of:

- visitor numbers
- types of feedback collected (negative and positive)

4.4 Describe how feedback can be used to inform the maintenance and development of the garden.

Section 3 – Delivery information

This qualification may be delivered in a variety of ways, but it is recommended that tutors encourage learners to apply knowledge and understanding through practical contexts to gain a thorough understanding of the theoretical and conceptual knowledge within the specification.

Application could be encouraged through:

- Visits to gardens to see in practice the planting and management of a variety of plant species
- Lectures from experts in plant identification and management
- Lectures from horticulturists working across a variety of contexts e.g. different types of gardens, working with different plant species
- Practical work carried out in identifying and managing plant species in own garden or in place of employment

Alongside the knowledge in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, there is an expectation that learners will gain a knowledge and understanding of the following areas which are relevant to general horticultural practice and are also reflected in particular learning outcomes and assessment criteria within the specification.

Health and Safety

- Knowledge of, and compliance with, current legislation as it relates to horticulture
- The management of risk within horticulture
- The storage, care and maintenance of PPE, tools and equipment in horticultural settings

Sustainability

The impact of horticulture on the wider environment, with specific reference to:

- Reduction of the negative impacts of horticultural practices
- The contribution of horticulture to the three pillars of sustainability (economic viability, social equity and environmental protection)
- The concept that horticulture should be net-positive, benefitting the wider environment
- The impact of horticulture on climate change
- The impact of climate change on horticulture

Best Practice

- Professional approaches and techniques
- Professional use of named plant species in a wide range of horticultural settings
- Horticultural practices which are professional, current, effective and sustainable
- The adoption of trials results, research and development findings

Equality and diversity

- Knowledge and compliance with all current legislation as it relates to horticulture
- The concepts of respect, fairness and dignity
- Negative impacts of poor practice to include discrimination, victimisation and harassment
- The advantages of inclusive cultures

Section 4 - Version History

Version	Date	Description of change
6	16/09/2026	Clarification to the presentation of grade boundary percentages.
7	25/09/2026	Page 40 – AC1.3 has been amended to Evaluate ..., rather than Explain.....