RHS Qualifications

RHS Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture

Qualification Specification

From September 2026

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Section 1: About this Qualification

1.1 Aims and objectives of the qualification

This qualification has been designed to provide learners with the breadth of horticultural knowledge and skills required to carry out routine tasks proficiently in a variety of contexts. It supports progression to employment within areas of the horticultural industries (such as professional gardening, landscaping, plant production and garden retail), as well as supporting learning in entry level roles in the early stages of a horticultural career. It is also designed to meet the needs of the amateur gardener.

It also provides learners the opportunity of personal development, including the changing of careers and engagement in their learning and offers an opportunity to develop transferable skills such as problem solving, implementing management plans/programmes, and communication as part of their applied learning.

In terms of progression, it allows learners the opportunity to progress to further learning opportunities at Level 3, allowing progression to higher education, career advancement or entry in the horticultural industries at a more advanced, technical level.

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.

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1.4 Assessment methods

This qualification will be assessed through two main methodologies:

- Two externally set practical assessment days – each consist of:
  - Plant Identification Assessment, candidates are required to accurately identify 10 plant specimens.
  - Three practical tasks, designed to assess a range of horticultural skills relevant to the qualification.
- One externally set and marked online assessment covering underpinning knowledge from across the specification.

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

1.5 Grading

Final grades for the qualification are based on the candidate's overall weighted percentage score across all assessments. The weighting of each assessment component is as follows:

- Practical Assessment Day 1: 40% of final mark
- Practical Assessment Day 2: 40% of final mark
- Online Assessment: 20% of final mark

Learners must first meet the minimum pass requirements for each individual assessment component:

- Plant Identification: 70% pass mark
- Each Practical Task: 50% pass mark
- Online Assessment: 60% pass mark

Once all components have been passed, the candidate's final grade is determined using the weighted overall score according to the thresholds below:

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.

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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 documents '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. Application 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.**

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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 procedure is 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

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Section 2: Units

2.1 Unit List

1.	Plant identification
2.	Plant establishment
3	Plant propagation
4.	Plant health
5.	Plant care
6.	Plant pruning
7.	Garden features
8.	Grassed areas

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.

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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 2

	The learner….	**The learner can….**
Level 2	Has knowledge and understanding of facts, procedures and ideas in an area of study or field of work to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. Can interpret relevant information and ideas. Is aware of a range of information that is relevant to the area of study or work	Select and use relevant cognitive and practical skills to complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems. Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions. Identify how effective actions have been.

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Command verbs used in this specification

Command verb	Use at Level 2	Examples
Describe	Provide a brief description of a well-defined context, situation or fact	Describe how…. Describe the role of…. Describe the impact of….
Explain	Provide an explanation of well-defined facts, procedures or processes	Explain why…. Explain how…. Explain the importance of….
Identify	Be able to name or know on sight the meaning of well-defined terminology, application of terms, concepts, processes, procedures or tasks.	Identify the meaning of…. Identify the concept of…. Identify the function of….
Select	Make a choice of the most appropriate option to carry out a task	Select plants to meet criteria Select tools or materials
Use	Use appropriate resources to carry out a task	Use tools Use techniques
Apply	Carry out tasks to apply products to appropriate areas	Apply fertiliser Apply mulches
Assess	Make an inspection of the condition of something	Assess the condition of plants Assess a site
Maintain	Carry out activities to maintain something	Maintain timber elements
Monitor	Carry out activities to monitor the condition of something	Monitor health of plants

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Interpret	Read information to extract the key points	Interpret plans Interpret plant labels
Calculate	Determine the amount of something mathematically	Calculate quantities of mulching Calculate quantities of fertiliser
Create	Carry out activities to bring something into existence	Create plant labels Create a hanging basket
Measure	Determine the size, amount or quantity of something	Measure temperature
Record	Write down for future reference	Record temperature
Control	Carry out activities to supervise the running of something	Control environmental conditions
Demonstrate	Carry out a practical activity to show skills or techniques	Demonstrate techniques Demonstrate appropriate management
Implement	Put something in place	Implement appropriate controls
Compare	Consider the positive and negative aspects of two items	Compare impacts of timber fences and hedges

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Unit 1 – Plant identification

Unit aim

The identification of plants and the application of scientific naming is a skill required and practiced by all horticulturists.

Accurate identification of plant material is crucial to enable horticulturists to communicate effectively, identify cultural requirements and to make sure they are working with appropriate taxa when undertaking practical tasks.

This unit also introduces learners to a range of plant material from key horticultural categories. It builds on the ability to identify plants by genus, species and cultivar to include plant knowledge relating to growth habits, characteristics and cultivation, thus providing the learner with a holistic plant knowledge.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to identify and select plants

Please note the range of plant material assessed will be listed in an annually updated RHS specimen list.

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify plants from the following categories using common name, genus, species and, where appropriate, variety or cultivar:

- alpines
- annual plants
- aquatics
- biennial plants
- bulbs, corms, rhizomes and tubers
- house plants
- perennials
- shrubs
- trees
- wall shrubs and climbers

1.2 Identify non-cultivated plants using common name, genus and species

1.3 Select plants to meet the following criteria:

- light/shade
- hardiness
- soil requirements
- flowering plants

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- foliage plants
- deciduous/evergreen
- scent
- fruit
- hedges
- height/spread
- interior landscapes

1.4 Describe the advantages and limitations of non-cultivated plants

1.5 Select and apply the terms ephemeral, annual, biennial, perennial, herbaceous perennial, shrub and tree to selected plants

1.6 Explain the importance of correct plant identification and how it influences cultivation and selection e.g. site suitability, aesthetic benefit

1.7 Explain the purposes and uses of plant names in horticultural settings e.g. propagation labels, selection of plants for planting

Amplification

AC1.2 and AC1.4 The term non-cultivated plants refers to all plants that may be growing within garden areas that are not intentionally cultivated, for example wild flowers, self-seeded garden plants and weeds. These plants should be recognised as having both positive and negative impacts.

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Unit 2 - Plant Establishment

Unit aim

Good plant establishment is vital for the long-term success of planted areas in a garden. Plant establishment requires learners to apply a holistic plant knowledge, an understanding of both plant health and plant care.

Assessing a site and its characteristics informs plant selection. Good site preparation is a key factor in plant survival, accurate marking out and plant spacing is essential for both aesthetics and plant health. Good planting techniques ensure the long-term success of a scheme.

This unit affords the learner the opportunity to develop skills in assessing the relevant characteristics of a site, how to prepare the site for planting and how to set out plants from a scheme. It also covers the skills of establishing planted areas from seed and established plants, in addition to the more specific skills of tree and hedge planting and planting in a range of container types and sizes.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to assess a site

Assessment criteria

1.1 Assess a site to identify opportunities and limitations, to include:

- drainage/water availability
- presence of pans/compaction
- light/shade
- Exposed/sheltered
- presence of annual/perennial weed
- soil health
- aspect
- existing planting
- pH
- soil type e.g. textural class, and structural classes

1.2 Identify actions to rectify planting site limitations, including:

- pruning to allow light in
- the breaking up of pans
- the removal of weed infestations
- the incorporation of organic matter

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1.3 Select plant species that will tolerate site conditions to include:

- wind Exposure
- flooding
- drought
- light
- shade
- soil textures
- soil pH

1.4 Identify the implications of climate change on water management and temperature

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to prepare a site for planting

Assessment criteria

2.1 Mark out a site to include square, rectangle and circle beds to acceptable tolerances

2.2 Prepare a site for planting, to include:

- the selection and safe use of appropriate tools
- the assessment of tool condition
- single digging where appropriate
- application of base dressing as per manufacturer's instructions
- base dressing
- incorporation of soil improvers
- raking and levelling
- the production of a tilth suitable for planting

2.3 Prepare the planting site using minimal cultivation principles

2.4 Maintain (including sharpen), clean and store hand tools

2.5 Monitor the site for the presence of soil pests, perennial weeds, poor/inappropriate cultural practices and other issues that impact on plant health

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to position plants prior to planting

Assessment criteria

3.1 Interpret a plan to set out a planting area

3.2 Position plants prior to planting, to include:

- assessing plant quality
- pruning plants
- checking plant quantities and spacings
- adjust plant spacings e.g. to suit site conditions or plant availability

3.3 Assess plant health and identification when positioning plant prior to planting

3.4 Identify the implications of different planting positions on plant health, establishment and growth

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to sow seeds in the open ground

Assessment criteria

4.1 Use hand tools safely to create a level site with a suitable tilth for seed germination

4.2 Select seeds suitable for the site, to include:

- densities and depth
- soil/growing media
- temperature
- seed quality
- provenance
- tilth
- aftercare

4.3 identify the Impacts of poor practice on seed germination and establishment

4.4 Use a garden line to set out seed drills

4.5 Sow small, medium and large sized seeds

4.6 Sow seed:

- in rows
- by station sowing
- by broadcasting in the soil

4.7 Explain what is meant by the stale seedbed technique to reduce weed competition

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Learning outcome 5 – Be able to establish new hedge plantings

Assessment criteria

5.1 Select suitable plants for hedge planting, to include:

- plant species
- plant specification
- spacings (single, double, staggered rows)
- use of guards/tubes
- water management

5.2 Calculate plant quantities required for a run of hedging

5.3 Plant bare root or container-grown hedging plants using hand tools, including a garden line

5.4 Consolidate soil and provide immediate aftercare to new plantings, including any pruning required and the fitting of guards/tubes

5.5 Describe the environmental benefits of hedges in comparison to other types of boundaries e.g. fence

5.6 Explain the importance of selecting the correct plant species for a hedge, depending upon purpose e.g. formal hedge, biodiversity and impact on adjacent properties

5.7 Identify the benefits of assessing soil and plant health prior to planting hedges

Learning outcome 6 – Be able to plant containers

Assessment criteria

6.1 Identify factors to consider when planting containers and hanging baskets including:

- species selection for character and growth
- environmental implications of container and growing media selection
- final location, irrigation/impact of shade/light/rain shadow on growth
- sustainability impacts

6.2 Create a planted container, to include:

- container selection
- growing media selection
- positioning of plants
- planting depth

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6.3 Select suitable plants for the container, to include:

- purpose
- design
- maintenance
- location

6.4 Create a planted hanging basket, to include:

- container selection
- growing media selection
- use of appropriate sustainable liner
- positioning of plants
- planting depth

6.5 Select suitable plants for the hanging basket, to include:

- purpose
- design
- maintenance
- location

Amplification

6.1 Sustainability impacts include the move away from using water retaining gels, and the impacts of using resin/plastic bound fertilisers and controlled release fertilisers (CRFs) with reference to the reduction in the use of single use plastics.

Learning outcome 7 – Be able to plant and stake trees

Assessment criteria

7.1 Identify factors in planting and staking trees, to include:

- ecosystem services provided by different species
- plant health implications of different staking systems
- planting techniques suitable for different stock sizes
- implications of plant specifications on planting e.g. bare root, container grown

7.2 Plant a standard tree, to include:

- depth of planting
- positioning
- support and protection systems (including orientation, height at point of attachment and method of attachment)

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- techniques to reduce the need for irrigation
- water management

7.3 Identify risks and mitigating actions for planting trees adjacent to properties

Learning outcome 8 – Be able to create and interpret plant labels

Assessment criteria

8.1 Identify attributes of suitable plant labels, to include:

- longevity
- avoidance of single use plastics

8.2 Create plant labels for living collections, to include:

- origin
- family
- accession number
- Award of Garden Merit (as appropriate)
- genus
- species
- cultivar

8.3 Create plant labels for propagation, to include:

- plant name
- date of sowing

8.4 Interpret plant labels, to identify and explain the information contained

8.5 Identify the implications of poor labelling practices

8.6 Describe the role of the accession number to link the plant to detailed information e.g. source, plant health assessments

Amplification

AC 8.1 Attributes of suitable plant labels e.g. longevity, avoidance of single use plastics.

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Unit 3 - Plant Propagation

Unit aim

This unit introduces learners to the facilities, the equipment and the skills involved in the propagation of a wide range of plant material.

Plant propagation is a core horticultural skill, allowing the horticulturist to raise new plant material, either from seed or by vegetative means, including cuttings and division.

Successful propagation relies on the facilities available, the quality of the propagation material, the skills of the horticulturist and a thorough understanding of plant health, which is considered in unit 4.

This unit will enable the learner to develop both skills and knowledge in the provision of a rooting environment to meet the needs of the species being propagated, the collection and the preparation of cuttings, the sowing of seeds, the pricking out of seedlings, the handling and insertion of propagules, along with the maintenance and use of tools and equipment.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to assess environmental conditions

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify the impact of environmental conditions on propagation, to include:

- maintaining turgidity of cuttings material
- relative humidity
- light
- air temperature
- rootzone temperature
- hygiene

1.2 Measure, record and control environmental conditions for propagation and plant health, to include:

- light/shade
- temperature
- ventilation
- relative humidity

1.3 Interpret environmental data to identify issues with propagation and make recommendations for improvements

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Learning outcome 2 – Be able to select propagation equipment

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify types of propagation equipment appropriate for a small-scale unit, to include equipment that is appropriate for:

- misting
- light
- ventilation
- heat

2.2 Identify the benefits provided by propagation facilities for success rates, efficiency, running costs and energy usage and impacts on sustainability

2.3 Identify the benefits of hygiene protocols and professional working practices for plant health and success rates

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to select growing media

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify the growing media requirements for named plants

3.2 Identify the sustainability factors affecting the choice of growing media, to include:

- minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions
- use of peat
- transporting bulk constituents e.g. coir
- single use plastics e.g. those used in controlled release fertilisers

3.3 Select growing media to meet requirements, to include:

- sustainability
- plant species
- purpose

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3.4 Describe the impact of different growing media on plant health and development, to include:

- sterility
- pH
- anchorage
- root access
- air filled porosity
- water management
- drainage
- nutrition e.g. electrical conductivity

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to propagate plants by seed in containers

Assessment criteria

4.1 Identify of the factors which influence seed viability, to include:

- harvesting
- handling
- treatment
- storage

4.2 Identify factors which affect seed germination, emergence and establishment rates, to include:

- seed e.g. viability, dormancy
- growing media
- container selection
- sowing depth
- seed density
- plant handling
- pricking out depth
- irrigation
- aftercare e.g. weaning

4.3 Propagate plants by seed in containers

4.4 Provide aftercare to seed, to include:

- monitor for plant pathogens
- water appropriately
- ensure suitable temperatures are maintained

4.5 Prick out seedlings, to include:

- stage of growth
- plant handling
- depth of planting

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4.6 Provide aftercare to pricked out seedlings, to include:

- Monitor for plant pathogens
- Water appropriately
- Ensure suitable temperatures are maintained

4.7 Explain the importance of seed provenance in relation to climate change

Amplification

AC4.1 Seed viability - factors that can affect seed viability, including the harvesting of seed, the correct practices to be observed when handling seed to avoid damage, the cleaning of seed, to include the removal of hairs and detritus, the use of seed coatings and the storage conditions necessary to preserve seed viability.

Learning outcome 5 – Be able to propagate plants by vegetative means

Assessment criteria

5.1 Identify cutting types and techniques, to include:

- softwood
- semi ripe
- hardwood
- leaf lamina
- leaf petiole.

5.2 Explain the importance of aftercare for cuttings, to include:

- Humidity
- Temperature
- Light levels
- Air flow
- spacing

5.3 Identify the factors involved with the propagation of plants by division, to include:

- suitable species
- timings
- critical success factors

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5.4 Propagate plants by cuttings, to include:

- the collection of parent material
- taking and inserting cuttings (leaf lamina, leaf petiole, softwood, semi ripe and hardwood)
- the insertion of propagules
- the aftercare of propagules, e.g. weaning

5.5 Identify factors influencing successful propagation, to include:

- stock beds/mother plants
- stock plant health
- timing of collection
- presence of pest, disease and pathogens
- the importance of material being true to type
- the storage of material to ensure maximum water content

5.6 Identify biosecurity measures in a propagation facility

Learning outcome 6 – Be able to select equipment for propagation

Assessment criteria

6.1 Identify and select hand tools used for propagation, to include:

- compost scoop
- presser boards
- sieves
- striking boards
- knives
- secateurs

6.2 Maintain hand tools including sterilisation, cleaning and sharpening, to include:

- knives
- secateurs

6.3 Demonstrate appropriate bench management and hygiene

6.4 Describe the role of hand tools in the spread of pests, diseases and pathogens and techniques to prevent transmission

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Unit 4 – Plant Health

Unit aim

To manage plants within gardens and designed landscapes, horticulturists need to identify all the factors that can negatively impact on plant growth.

This unit considers the attributes of a healthy plant, before moving on to consider the many different factors that can impact on plant health.

Identification, monitoring and control of these factors are considered along with the impact of controls on the wider environment.

Monitoring the factors that cause poor health status requires the horticulturist to be able to diagnose nutritional deficiencies and to identify a range of plant pests and pathogens.

The role of husbandry, cultivation practices and the use of formal models are considered to manage plant health.

Learning outcome 1 - Understand plant health

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify the characteristics of a healthy plant, to include:

- Intact leaves and stem
- Appropriate leaf colouration
- Appropriate vigour
- Clear from pests and disease

1.2 Identify factors that influence plant health including environment, plant husbandry and plant selection

1.3 Describe techniques for ensuring plant health, to include:

- resistant cultivar selection
- encouraging natural predators
- physical plant protection
- correct pruning techniques
- control of pests and pathogens

1.4 Describe the Impact of biosecurity on horticultural practices

1.5 Describe the impact of chemical controls on plant health

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1.6 Identify remedial actions to correct the results of poor husbandry practices, to include:

- water and nutrient management
- planting practices
- pruning
- introduction of infected wood products
- inadequate biosecurity and hygiene

1.7 Explain the value of maintenance schedules and garden health plans, to include:

- identification of natural predators at key lifestyle stages
- use of cultivars that are resistant to plant health problems
- identification of alternative hosts for pests and diseases
- identification of pruning practices that could damage plant health

1.8 Identify the wider environmental impacts of pesticide usage

Amplification

AC1.8 The wider environmental impact of all UK-approved garden chemicals including those certified for use in organic growing, for example, the impacts of neonicotinoids on pollinators, the impacts of chemicals on aquatic life. When learners refer to a chemical, it should be through reference to active ingredient rather than product name.

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to assess nutritional deficiencies

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify the principles of plant nutrition including the basic role of plant nutrients

2.2 Identify types of fertiliser, to include:

- straight
- compound
- powder
- granules/prills
- controlled release

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2.3 Identify fertiliser application methods, to include:

- top dressings
- base dressings
- liquid feed
- foliar feed
- fertigation

2.4 Describe the formulation of fertilisers, to include analysis of NPK content

2.5 Identify nutrient deficiencies, to include:

- macronutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulphur, magnesium
- micronutrients: iron, boron, manganese, and molybdenum

2.6 Remedy nutrient deficiencies, to include:

- macronutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulphur, magnesium
- micronutrients: iron, boron, manganese, and molybdenum

2.7 Mix and apply liquid feeds

2.8 Calculate application rates for fertilisers based on manufacturers' instructions

2.9 Describe the negative environmental impacts of fertilisers, including over application, extraction, manufacture e.g. carbon footprint, transport and run off

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to identify and monitor pests, pathogens and diseases

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify common plant pests, at different horticulturally significant lifecycle stages

3.2 Identify the damage/residue caused by common plant pathogens

3.3 Identify the impact of plant pests and pathogens on plant health e.g. reduced photosynthetic efficiency, interruption of transpiration stream

Amplification

AC3.1 While the key horticulturally significant lifestyle stages of pests should be identified (e.g. cabbage white butterfly eggs, caterpillar and adult), learners are not expected to have a detailed entomological knowledge of lifecycles.

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Learning outcome 4 – Be able to implement IPM/Garden Health Plans

Assessment criteria

4.1 Interpret a garden health plan to determine the appropriate response and correct procedures to manage a plant health issue

4.2 Describe the impact of garden health plans on horticultural operations, to include:

- plant propagation
- establishment
- plant care
- pruning

Amplification

Garden health plans consider the entire range of potential impacts on plant health, while considering the mitigations that can be carried out to manage these threats. Integrated Pest Management is a component part of garden health plans, along with the management of other abiotic factors.

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Unit 5 – Plant Care

Unit aim

This unit introduces learners to the care and maintenance of plants within gardens and designed landscapes.

The care of plants often involves the use of garden management and maintenance plans along with the development of cultural practices that enhance plant growth.

The role and the use of such plans is introduced to learners within the unit, along with other key areas including irrigation, feeding, staking and supporting of plants.

The interrelationship between plant care and plant health, the management of weed populations, the use of mulching, along with the potting of plants and the management of green waste are investigated within this unit.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to follow maintenance plans

Assessment criteria

1.1 Interpret maintenance plans to carry out garden maintenance activities

1.2 Use maintenance plans to plan garden maintenance activities

1.3 Describe the advantages of garden maintenance plans in relation to:

- soil management regimes
- plant establishment
- the care of grassed areas
- the maintenance of garden features
- the maintenance of garden areas
- timing and method of pruning.

Amplification

AC1.1, AC1.2 and AC1.3 garden maintenance plans consider the tasks that are required on an annual basis to ensure the garden area or feature is maintained to a high standard. They include pruning, weed control, and soil management regimes, along with other considerations appropriate to the area being managed

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Learning outcome 2 – Be able to manage water use

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify water requirements for specified plants according to:

- plant species
- planting density
- plant size
- observation of soil texture
- growing media used

2.2 Select and use the appropriate irrigation system for the specified plants

2.3 Explain the advantages and limitations of irrigation systems to include:

- watering cans
- seep hose
- microbore
- sprinklers
- pop up systems
- reservoirs in containers

2.4 Describe how fertigation can impact the reliability of irrigation systems

2.5 Describe how irrigation requirements are affected by:

- the site
- container size
- planting density
- type of plant
- growing media/soil types

2.6 Identify the signs of water stress in woody and herbaceous plants to include factors such as wilting and foliage colour

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to apply fertiliser

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify the reasons why fertilisers are used in horticulture

3.2 Identify the fertiliser requirements for selected horticultural contexts based on:

- Timings for fertiliser applications
- Application rates based on manufacturers' recommendations
- Plant requirements to include:
    - Phosphorous for root establishment
    - Nitrogen for vegetative growth
    - Potassium for floriferous plants

3.3 Apply granular fertiliser as a base dressing

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to stake and support plants

Assessment criteria

4.1 Identify the staking and support requirements for selected plants including trees, climbers and herbaceous perennials:

- The type of plant support system required
- The purpose of the plant support system

4.2 Install support systems for the selected plants

4.3 Describe the advantages and limitations of different plant support systems to include:

- Herbaceous plant support systems
- Productive growing support systems
- Climbing plant support systems

4.4 Identify factors that affect the maintenance of plant support systems, to include:

- Plant species
- Timing and method of pruning
- Wider maintenance of garden features

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Learning outcome 5 – Be able to promote plant health

Assessment criteria

5.1 Identify situations likely to impact plant health, to include:

- flooding
- drought
- poor plant support
- over application of fertiliser
- overcrowding
- soil compaction
- dense weed/seedling growth

5.2 Use a garden management plan to inform decisions to promote plant health

5.3 Carry out activities to promote plant health

5.4 Describe the impact of poor cultural practices on plant health, to include:

- poor irrigation practice,
- poor plant support
- over application of fertiliser
- overcrowding
- soil compaction
- inappropriate light levels

Learning outcome 6 – Be able to apply mulches

Assessment criteria

6.1 Identify circumstances where mulching would be needed

6.2 Calculate quantities of mulching required for a given area

6.3 Apply mulches to the area with consideration of:

- The materials selected
- Depth
- Proximity to the plant stem

6.4 Describe the advantages and limitations of using different mulching materials to include:

- Composted bark
- Wood chip
- Manure or digestate
- Gravel
- Weed membranes

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Learning outcome 7 – Be able to control weeds

Assessment criteria

7.1 Identify the control measures for annual weeds, to include:

- hand/mechanical weed control e.g. the use of a hoe
- mulching
- stale seedbed
- heat treatment
- chemical controls

7.2 Identify the control measures for perennial weeds, to include:

- hand/manual weed control
- mulching
- chemical controls.

7.3 Describe the positive and negative impacts of weeds, to include:

- biodiversity impacts
- ecosystem services
- coverage of soil

7.4 Use hand or mechanical control measures to control weeds including:

- selecting the most appropriate tools
- how the method exploits identified weaknesses in plant lifecycles or biology

7.5 Describe the control measures and legal considerations for the control of the following weeds, to include:

- Elymus repens
- Aegopodium podagraria
- Calystegia sepium
- Fallopia japonica
- Equisetum arvense
- Heracleum mantegazzianum

7.6 Describe how legal restrictions affect the disposal of weeds e.g. waste carriers' licenses, double bagging

Amplification

AC7.4 Please note - should be aware that the only acceptable chemical control is in specific cases where the risk of allowing weed to spread is greater than the risk of chemical use (e.g. control of Japanese knotweed by a qualified individual)

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Learning outcome 8 – Be able to pot off and pot on plants

Assessment criteria

8.1 Use appropriate techniques to pot off and pot on selected plants including:

- selection of the appropriate potting off/potting on technique for the stage of growth
- selecting appropriate containers
- selecting appropriate growing media

8.2 Identify the impact of incorrect techniques for potting on and potting off

Amplification

AC 8.1 Potting on is potting a plant from an individual container into a larger container. For example, a 9cm container into a 1 or 2 litre container. Potting off is moving young plants from a shared container, such as a seed tray, into a small individual container.

Learning outcome 9 – Be able to manage green waste

Assessment criteria

9.1 Identify types of green waste management, to include:

- cold composting
- hot composting
- vermi-composting
- bokashi composting.

9.2 Identify how traditional composting takes into consideration:

- the management of perennial weeds
- ensuring optimum carbon:nitrogen ratios

9.3 Select and use composting techniques for a composting system to include:

- apply waste to a compost heap
- turn a compost heap.

9.4 Describe how to resolve composting problems, to include:

- incorrect oxygen levels
- incorrect moisture levels
- incorrect temperature range
- slow breakdown of material
- weed seeds present in final compost
- management of leachate

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9.5 Describe the advantages and limitations of using composted green waste to support garden maintenance processes

9.6 Describe the potential impacts of composted green waste on plant health

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Unit 6 – Plant Pruning

Unit aim

The pruning of plants is an important horticultural skill used to maintain plant health and vertical boundaries, ensure productivity in cultivated fruit, and maintain the shape and habit of ornamental plants.

This unit introduces learners to the principles of pruning, considering the purpose, the impacts and the timing of pruning on plant growth and biodiversity. Legal considerations when planning pruning, along with the disposal of arisings are also considered.

Learners will develop skills in pruning, with specific reference to positions of cuts and the plant health impacts. Learners will also develop skills relating to pruning hedges using both shears, and powered hedge trimmers.

The unit also considers the care, maintenance and sharpening of pruning tools and equipment.

Please note: Activities carried out for learning outcomes 2 and 3 should not require learners to work at height.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to carry out pruning

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify the principles of pruning, to include:

- cut positioning
- plant health
- structure
- aesthetics
- time of the year
- desirable growth response.

1.2 Identify the legal requirements for carrying out pruning, to include:

- working at height regulations
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Town & Country Planning Act 1990. (Tree Preservation Orders)
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. (ConservationAreas).

1.3 Describe the advantages and limitations of Tree Preservation Orders on the management of tree health/maintenance

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1.4 Select appropriate pruning techniques to ensure the healthy growth of specified plants, shrubs and trees, to include:

- dead wood removal
- diseased wood removal
- damaged wood removal
- duplicated wood removal
- aesthetic appearance
- structure of plant
- desirable growth response

1.5 Describe appropriate pruning system for specified plants, trees and shrubs, to include:

- formative
- regenerative
- maintenance
- coppicing/stooling
- specialist
- correct timing for each method

1.6 Describe how to assess the condition of plants and surroundings prior to pruning, to include:

- condition of features when pruning e.g. walls, trellis, presence of wasps/potential hazards
- monitoring health of plants e.g. pests, nutritional deficiencies
- suitability of plant to site and actions that might be required e.g. move, root prune

1.7 Select and use hand tools to make pruning cuts on selected plants, to include:

- secateurs
- loppers
- pruning saws
- correct cutting positioning for each method

1.8 Dispose of arisings with consideration of:

- plant health implications, sustainability
- protection of associated structures and features
- Impact of air quality when burning arisings

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Learning outcome 2 – Be able to prune hedges

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify the purpose and functions of hedges within gardens and designed landscapes

2.2 Describe the advantages and limitations of plant species for use in formal or informal hedges

2.3 Identify situations where formal or informal hedge pruning is required

2.4 Carry out activities to prune a selected hedge, using shears and powered hedge trimmers

2.5 Identify potential plant diseases which may be harboured by hedges e.g. fireblight or mildew

2.6 Describe the impact of pruning practices on biodiversity

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to maintain pruning tools and hedge trimmers

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify the characteristics, purpose and maintenance requirements of selected hand tools, to include:

- secateurs
- hand shears
- pruning saw
- loppers

3.2 Sharpen, clean, sterilise and lubricate selected tools

3.3 Describe the importance of control measures to prevent the spread of pests, diseases and pathogens when using hand tools

Amplification

AC3.2 the maintenance and sharpening of powered hedge trimmers is not part of this assessment criterion , however learners should be able to sterilise and clean hedge trimmers after use

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Unit 7 – Garden features

Unit aim

Horticulturists do not just care for the plants within gardens and designed landscapes; they also care for and maintain a wide range of garden features.

These features include timber elements, paved elements, plant supports and ponds.

Learners will develop knowledge and skills to inspect, clean and maintain features, along with reporting back on their condition.

Please note that maintenance activities in this unit should not require learners to work at height.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to maintain garden features

Assessment criteria

1.1 Interpret garden maintenance plans to:

- identify routine works needed on selected garden features
- identify where and when specialist skills are required to carry out maintenance
- identify areas of maintenance that need to comply with current legislation

1.2 Carry out a visual inspection of garden features to Identify areas which are unsafe

1.3 Describe how extending the life of garden features impacts sustainability

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to maintain timber elements

Assessment criteria

2.1 Carry out a visual inspection of **either** a fence, pergola **or** trellis to identify maintenance requirements

2.2 Maintain timber elements, to include:

- Cleaning
- Application of preservatives or treatments

2.3 Compare the sustainability and biodiversity impacts of timber fences and hedges

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to maintain paved and hard surfaces

Assessment criteria

3.1 Carry out a visual inspection of paths and hard surfaces to assess requirements for:

- routine repairs and maintenance e.g. repairing pointing and unstable slabs
- control of algae and weed control, including abrasive methods/brushing manually or mechanically
- resealing paving/decking after pressure washing

3.2 Carry out maintenance activities to control of algae and weeds on paved surfaces and paths

3.3 Describe the impact of maintenance activities on the site e.g. the effect of cleaning products for paths and surfaces and plant health

3.4 Describe the impact of inadequate plant maintenance and overgrown vegetation the growth of surface moss and algae

Amplification

AC3.1 At this level routine repairs are limited to rebedding a loose paving slab, raking out and replacing pointing. A knowledge of cement and concrete mixes is not required.

AC3.2 Using either manual or mechanical methods.

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to maintain plant supports

Assessment criteria

4.1 Carry out a visual inspection of plant supports to assess condition and maintenance requirements

4.2 Maintain plant supports to include the removal of overgrown plant material and the adjustment of tree ties

4.3 Identify works that require professional maintenance

4.4 Describe the impact of plant supports on plant health, sustainability and pruning

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Learning outcome 5 – Be able to maintain ponds

Assessment criteria

5.1 Interpret a pond maintenance schedule to assess requirements for:

- Weed control
- Removal of silt and debris
- Cleaning and checking of pumps, fountains and filters

5.2 Describe the impact of pond maintenance activities on biodiversity

5.3 Describe the importance of identifying aquatic plants for correct maintenance

5.4 Describe the impact of site maintenance practices on ponds e.g. fertiliser regimes

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Unit 8 – Grassed areas

Unit aim

Grassed areas are a key component of many gardens and designed landscapes. It used to be argued that at their best they can be perfect green swards of pristine horticultural beauty. However, current thinking has developed to consider that such grassed areas are at their best when they are rich in wildflowers, creating biodiverse rich green spaces.

This unit covers the skills required to establish and maintain grassed areas in private and public garden settings. It will include an understanding of turf species mixes for different purposes, how to establish grassed areas, and maintenance procedures including mowing, scarifying, weed control and maintaining plant health using sustainable practices.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to identify turf species and seed mixes for different purposes

Assessment criteria

1.1 Specify grasses and forbs to meet requirements for types of grassed areas, based on intended maintenance regime, to include:

- fine turf
- utility lawns
- shaded areas
- meadows
- non-grass ground cover (for example Chamaemelum, Thymus and moss)

1.2 Identify the advantages and limitations of traditional lawns and more diverse grass and non-grass surfaces, to include:

- environmental impact
- biodiversity
- function.

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Learning outcome 2 – Be able to establish grassed areas

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify factors to consider when establishing specified grassed areas, to include:

- soil conditions
- soil fertility
- suitable tilth
- levels
- settling of soil
- ensuring even seeding
- reducing turf shrinkage
- aftercare procedures for a newly sown or turfed lawn, from sowing/laying to first cut
- irrigation requirements

2.2 Carry out activities to:

- rake, consolidate and level a site for seeding
- sow seed to a specified density

2.3 Carry out activities to:

- rake, consolidate and level a site for laying turf
- lay lawn turf
- irrigate newly laid turf

2.4 Describe how water can be used sustainably during establishment and over the life of the lawn

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to mow grassed areas

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify the criteria for first cut on a newly turfed or sown lawn

3.2 Identify the appropriate equipment and mowing regimes for:

- fine turf
- utility lawns
- shaded areas
- meadows.

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3.3 Identify the biodiversity, sustainability and plant health impacts of different mowing regimes, to include:

- weekly mowing regimes
- monthly mowing regimes
- annual mowing regimes
- collection of arisings
- mulching mowers

3.4 Describe the implication of the one third rule for grass removal on turf quality and health

3.5 Mow a grassed area using a rotary lawn mower, to include:

- prestart checks
- health and safety considerations
- personal protective equipment
- set height of cut
- produce a specified finish

3.6 Describe the sustainability implications of different mowing equipment, to include:

- user-propelled
- self-propelled
- battery
- petrol

3.7 Describe the influence of mowing regimes on biodiversity

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to carry out scarifying and aerating activities

Assessment criteria

4.1 Identify situations where scarification and aeration are required

4.2 Scarify a given lawn to remove thatch

4.3 Aerate a given area of lawn by either hollow tine or spiking

4.4 Identify wider site implications of aeration and scarifying e.g. plant health benefits

4.5 Identify actions to make aeration and scarifying activities more sustainable e.g. composting of arisings

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Learning outcome 5 – Be able to control lawn weeds

Assessment criteria

5.1 Identify types of lawn weeds, to include:

- moss/algae
- broad leaf weeds/forbs
- weed grasses

5.2 Use a quadrat to identify the forbs present in a biodiverse lawn

5.3 Describe how forbs benefit biodiversity

5.4 Describe the advantages and limitations of chemical and non-chemical methods of weed control on lawns

5.5 Carry out activities to control lawn weeds, using non-chemical control methods

Learning outcome 6 – Be able to maintain turf health

Assessment criteria

6.1 Identify and report turf pests, diseases and deficiency symptoms, to include damage caused by:

- Mammals
- Invertebrates
- fungi

6.2 Identify factors that require interventions to maintain turf health

6.3 Carry out cultural practices to control the spread of turf pests and pathogens

6.4 Describe the advantages and limitations of lawn feeds, to include:

- Sustainability of different lawn feeds
- Impacts on soil organisms and biodiversity
- Organic and traditional approaches

6.5 Calculate quantities of lawn fertiliser for application based upon manufacturer's instructions and lawn area

6.6 Identify the Impacts of incorrect application of lawn fertiliser

6.7 Identify the role of garden health plans in ensuring lawn health through the use of Integrated Pest Management

6.8 Identify the benefits of adopting organic lawn management systems

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Learning outcome 7 – Be able to repair turf

Assessment criteria

7.1 Identify repair requirements for a given area of turf, to assess:

- Bare patches
- Ruts
- Pest and disease
- Level fluctuations
- Damaged edges

7.2 Carry out activities to repair lawn turf based on assessment of turf health

7.3 Describe the causes of turf damage and the site factors that influence them e.g. shading by trees, location of paths

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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 management
- Lectures from horticulturalists 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

Centres should ensure that where practical activities are stipulated, they provide sufficient resource and time for learners to practise the use of horticultural techniques, tools and materials to prepare them for the practical assessment.

Practical assessments will require access to resources including areas of land used for planting or maintenance, and garden features and landscaping elements as specified in this document.

Alongside the requirements 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)

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- The concept that horticulture should be net-positive, benefiting 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

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Section 4 – Version History

Version	Date	Description of change
9	16/09/2026	Clarification to the presentation of grade boundary percentages.
10	24/09/2026	Minor numbering corrections.

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