RHS Qualifications

RHS Level 3 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 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 includes the application of principles of horticultural science and provides opportunities for learners to seek out best practice, select 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 assessed through three main methodologies:

- One externally set practical assessment, consisting of:
    - Plant Identification Assessment, candidates are required to accurately identify a set number of plant specimens.
    - Three practical tasks, designed to assess a range of horticultural skills relevant to the qualification.

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    - Professional discussion – taken at a centre with the examiner on Teams.
- 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: 70% of final mark
- Online Assessment: 30% of final mark

Practical Assessment consists of:

- Tasks: 50%
- Plant Identification: 25%
- Professional Discussion: 25%

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

- Plant Identification: 70% pass mark
- Each Practical Task: 50% pass mark
- Professional Discussion: 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 knowledge
2.	Creating planted areas
3	Maintaining planted areas
4.	Plant health
5.	Productive growing
6.	Protected growing
7.	Ecological and sustainable plantings
8.	Landscaping materials

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.

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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….
Explain	Provide an explanation of well-defined but complex facts, procedures or processes	Explain why…. Explain how…. Explain the importance of….

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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 style (from given features)….. Identify sources of information…. Identify plant information….
Select	Make a choice of the most appropriate option to carry out a task	Select information Select tools or materials
Use	Use appropriate resources to carry out a task	Use current research
Apply	Apply information or knowledge in a practical context	Apply design principles Apply research
Assess	Make a judgement about something	Assess the impact
Maintain	Carry out activities to maintain something	Maintain a range of protective structures
Calculate	Determine the amount of something mathematically	Calculate quantities and costs
Create	Carry out activities to bring something into existence	Create plant specifications Create and monitor a programme
Control	Carry out activities to supervise the running of something	Control environmental conditions
Implement	Put something in place	Implement a planting scheme
Design	Plan the look of something	Design a planting scheme Design site-based trials

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Unit 1 – Plant knowledge

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore how to identify plants and describe plants using scientific names, and how to specify and source plant material. They will develop an understanding of the many roles plant material plays within gardens.

Learners will also explore the practical propagation of a range of plant material using specialist techniques.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to identify the requirements of plant species

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe the following plants using scientific names:

- alpines
- annual plants
- aquatics
- biennial plants
- bulbs, corms, rhizomes and tubers
- invasive plants
- herbaceous perennials
- shrubs
- trees
- houseplants

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

- flowering plants
- non-flowering plants

1.3 Describe the Influence of plant requirement on cultivation practices, to include:

- impact of origin
- impact of provenance
- suitability of plant for different situations, e.g. hedging, small garden
- management e.g. pruning requirement
- adaptability e.g. pH range tolerated

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1.4 Describe the impact of incorrect plant selection to include:

- management e.g. pruning requirement
- suitability of plant for different situations, e.g. dry shade, full sun
- biotic factors
- abiotic factors

1.5 Describe the wider considerations to be made when managing plants e.g. maintenance of plants, ecological and sustainable plantings

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to source and specify plants

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify terminology used in plant specifications, including:

- Botanical Nomenclature
  - Binomial Name
  - Genus (plural: Genera)
  - Species
  - Cultivar
- Morphological Terms (Plant Anatomy and Form)
  - Habit/Growth Habit
  - Deciduous
  - Evergreen
  - Herbaceous
  - Woody
  - Perennial
  - Root
  - Stem
  - Leaf
  - Flower
  - Fruit
- Horticultural and Landscape Terms
  - Bare Root
  - Containerized
  - Container Grown
  - Deadhead
  - Drainage
  - Ericaceous
  - Feathered Trees
  - Full Sun/Shade
  - Mulch
  - pH
  - Root Ball / Root Balled
  - Standard trees

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2.2 Identify criteria for supplier selection, to include:

- biosecurity policies
- quality assurance
- ability to meet specification
- reputation
- previous experience

2.3 Identify criteria to ensure the quality of plant material, to include:

- true to type
- stock size
- quality
- shape
- branch structure
- root health/girdling
- suitable rootstock
- graft position
- absence of epicormic growth

2.4 Describe the impacts of poor plant quality including:

- aesthetic perspectives
- the impact on establishment

2.5 Describe the wider considerations to be made when specifying and sourcing plants including:

- yield or growth in productive growing
- post planting management when establishing new plantings
- size of plant or container on sustainability

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to locate plants within gardens and designed landscapes

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe the functions that plants can perform within a garden, to include:

- ecosystem services
- vertical barriers/hedges
- windbreaks
- edible plants/fruit/berries
- aesthetic

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3.2 Describe the design considerations when grouping plants for display, to include:

- rhythm
- colour
- shape
- texture
- movement
- sound
- scent

3.3 Describe the role of plants in supporting biodiversity, including:

- Food and habitat
- Pollination
- Ecosystem stability
- Climate regulation
- Soil health and erosion control

3.4 Specify plant material for differing functions within a garden, to include:

- ecosystem services
- vertical barriers
- floral displays
- clipped plants/topiary
- reducing noise
- scent

3.5 Create plant specifications to meet site and design requirements, to include:

- formal
- naturalistic
- herbaceous
- woodland
- botanical collections
- Mediterranean
- tropical plantings

3.6 Describe wider considerations to be made when specifying plants to include ecosystem services including:

- Their use in swales and sustainable drainage schemes
- Their use in the provision of wildlife corridors
- Their use in ecological and sustainable plantings

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Learning outcome 4 – Be able to use propagation techniques

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the advantages of budding and grafting in plant propagation

4.2 Carry out plant propagation, to include:

- techniques to break seed dormancy
- bulb propagation
- root cuttings
- simple layering
- stem cuttings to include:
  - wounding
  - heel
  - internodal
  - stem bud

4.3 Describe the wider considerations for propagation, including:

- the advantages of locally propagated plant material in ecological and sustainable plantings
- the role of propagation in productive and protected growing

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Unit 2 – Creating Planted Areas

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore how horticulturists create gardens and designed landscapes which improve the lives of people and help to preserve and enhance biodiversity.

Learners will understand the range of considerations required to create planting in a variety of sites and develop a scientific approach to site assessment, along with a knowledge of how sites can influence plant selection and planting style.

Learners will also investigate best practice to ensure the techniques being developed are the most appropriate for the given situation.

Learning outcome 1 – be able to prepare a site

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe considerations when creating planted areas, to include:

- abiotic factors e.g. service locations, drainage characteristics
- biotic factors e.g. soil condition, perennial weeds
- limiting site preparation to minimise negative effects on the wider environment

1.2 Plan site preparation to embrace site characteristics prior to planting

1.3 Prepare site for planting

1.4 Describe the impact of:

- plant selection on the development of site improvement plans
- the development of horticultural sites e.g. production of fruit, management of grassed areas
- sustainable horticultural practices on the development of sites

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Learning outcome 2 – Be able to design planting schemes

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify factors that influence and inform a planting scheme to include:

- function
- style
- site limitations
- client requirement
- budget (the level of detail regarding budget would be limited to the cost of different sizes of plant material, or the cost of replacing annual plants when compared to the cost of perennial plants)

2.2 Design a planting scheme to meet site requirements and design criteria.
The planting scheme should be produced as a working document. Plans do not have to be presented to high professional standards, but must be clear, to scale and readable.

2.3 Produce a planting plan to indicate:

- plant names
- planting positions
- numbers of plants required

The planting plan should be produced as a working document. Plans do not have to be presented to high professional standards, but must be clear,-to scale and readable.

2.4 Describe the seasonal interest of different plant species including:

- Spring and summer flowers and foliage
- Autumn foliage, berries and seeds
- Winter evergreens, winter blooms, texture and bark

2.5 Apply design principles to the planting scheme

2.6 Identify criteria for the selection of suppliers

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to carry out planting

Assessment criteria

3.1 Implement a planting scheme/plan, to include:

- identification of plant material
- quantity checks
- quality check
- health checks
- quarantine requirements
- set out plants
- planting technique
- irrigation/water management
- mulching

3.2 Specify plant support and protection products

3.3 Describe the impacts of poor plant specification, and planting on plant health and maintenance

3.4 Describe the purpose and importance of good biosecurity practices when specifying/receiving plants for planting

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to maintain and manage plants post-planting

Assessment criteria

4.1 Manage new plantings, to include:

- monitoring of health status
- replacement of failed plants
- water management
- provide nutrition if appropriate
- cultural requirements (e.g. pruning, plant supports)
- plan weed control techniques and timings (both perennial and annual weeds)

4.2 Describe the impact of plant selection on the management of new plantings e.g. relating to nutrition and pruning

4.3 Evaluate own management techniques against best practice in post planting management

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Unit 3 – Maintaining Planted Areas

Unit aim

In this unit learners will consider the maintenance requirements of a small garden area and understand the use of maintenance schedules and garden management plans, which inform garden-wide maintenance decisions. They will understand how to use information sources to incorporate best practice into maintenance plans.

Learners will also understand how garden trials are used to evaluate garden maintenance.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to maintain planted areas

Assessment criteria

1.1 Identify maintenance operations for existing planted areas e.g. a rose garden or coppice, to include:

- maintenance standards
- maintenance practices
- ensuring the integrity of the original design concept
- effectiveness of the planted area

1.2 Describe the impact of garden maintenance techniques and scheduling on biodiversity

1.3 Identify requirements for the scheduled maintenance of paths and other hard surfaces

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to use garden management plans/maintenance schedules

Garden management plans are strategic documents that set out the direction and approach that the garden will take. Maintenance schedules include, plant maintenance, pruning, weed control and the management of plant health.

Assessment criteria

2.1 Describe the role of garden management plans to inform:

- maintenance and management decisions in gardens and designed landscapes
- the delivery of garden management plans

2.2 Produce maintenance schedules for garden areas

2.3 Describe the impact of poor garden management on biodiversity, plant health, and yield (within productive growing settings)

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to use evidence-based practice

Assessment criteria

3.1 Identify sources of reliable information on plant maintenance techniques and their suitability for different situations and species. Reliable information includes:

- professional bodies
- information from trusted sources (e.g. provided by the centre)

3.2 Select and use information in their own practice to:

- inform decisions on plant maintenance by best practice
- inform decisions made based on the most up to date information

3.3 Reflect on how the information used has informed and enhanced their own practice

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to evaluate plant maintenance techniques

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe how trials can be used to evaluate horticultural practices on site, e.g. the control of perennial weed, cultivation techniques

4.2 Identify procedures for running informal site-based trials on a given garden or designed landscape

- selection of plant material
- site selection and assessment
- site preparation
- logistics

4.3 Design and conduct site-based trials to evaluate the efficacy of horticultural practices including:

- treatments, e.g. scarification/stratification or pathogen control
- control plots
- replicates and randomisation
- selection of plant material
- ongoing maintenance
- documentation and recording of trial data

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4.4 Produce a report on the trials including:

- methodology for conducting the trial
- recording of data
- interpretation of results
- conclusions

4.5 Describe factors that might influence trial results e.g. weather, pests

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Unit 4 – Plant Health

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore how plant health is managed through a range of techniques. They will investigate how the implementation of biosecurity protocols limits and controls the spread of organisms that can be detrimental to plant health.

Learners will also understand how wider environmental impacts on plant health must be managed, which includes abiotic factors such as wind and frost.

Learners will explore how Integrated Pest Management is used by horticulturalists to inform the control of pests, diseases and pathogens. This is integrated into the development of garden health plans, which inform the management of all plant health impacts within a garden or designed landscape, both biotic and abiotic.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to manage biosecurity

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe the development and use of biosecurity policies within horticulture

1.2 Describe how to identify biosecurity weaknesses in horticultural settings e.g. application of best practice principles

1.3 Identify areas of weakness within given biosecurity policies

1.4 Describe the Impact of sourcing policies, quarantine practices, cultivar/variety/species selection, cultivation practices and a changing climate on biosecurity

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to assess biotic and abiotic impacts on plant health

Assessment criteria

2.1 Identify biotic factors that influence plant health, to include:

- vectors e.g. aphids or wood packaging materials
- diseases e.g. fungal/viral/bacterial pathogens
- pests e.g. adult/larval forms
- the management of the plant e.g. pruning, husbandry

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2.2 Identify abiotic factors that influence plant health, to include:

- climate (humidity, water, temperature, wind, frost)
- water storage
- pollution
- soil e.g. texture/drainage

2.3 Identify protocols required to reduce the risk of pest, disease and pathogen infestations

2.4 Explain the role of the FERA UK Plant Health Risk Register

2.5 Explain the impact of current plant health legislation including:

- Plant passports
- Phytosanitary certificates

2.6 Explain the effect of abiotic factors e.g. temperature, humidity on pest and pathogen fecundity

2.7 Explain the importance of evidence-based decisions when managing pests and diseases

2.8 Explain the impact of plant species and the horticultural setting on the management of pests, pathogens and diseases

2.9 Explain how the management of protected growing environments promotes plant health

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to create an Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM)

Assessment criteria

3.1 Create and monitor an IPM programme, including:

- planning
- scouting (identification and monitoring)
- prevention
- mitigation/control (economic threshold, cultural, physical, biological)
- record keeping and communication

3.2 Explain how the implementation of an IPM impacts horticultural settings

3.3 Explain the use of IPM programmes for specific horticultural settings e.g. productive growing, management of garden areas

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Learning outcome 4 – Be able to plan garden health

Assessment criteria

4.1 Create a garden health plan for a given horticultural setting to include:

- biotic factors, e.g. presence of disease within the geographic locality
- abiotic factors, e.g. impact of soil types, frost pockets
- IPM principles
- identification of all risks to plant health e.g. nutrition, pests and disease
- methods to limit or mitigate such risks e.g. wind breaks, use of micro climates

4.2 Explain the impact of organic and sustainability principles on the management of garden areas

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Unit 5 – Productive Growing

Unit aim

Productive growing within a garden setting involves the cultivation of vegetables, culinary herbs and fruit crops for human consumption.

The production of edible crops requires a broad range of skills, including propagation, cultivation and harvesting.

Cultivation techniques include organic growing systems, container growing and the adoption of minimal cultivation, or no dig systems.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to cultivate vegetables

Assessment criteria

1.1 Explain the advantages and limitations of different growing systems, to include:

- certified organic production
- minimal cultivation
- bed systems
- open ground

1.2 Describe factors when planning a cropping schedule for the production of vegetables, to include:

- space available
- crop rotations
- continuity of supply
- Gantt charts
- presence of perennial crops

1.3 Describe factors when harvesting crops, to include:

- the stage of development for harvest
- the removal of field heat
- the shelf life and/or storage of the crop

1.4 Demonstrate management of a range of vegetable crops, to include:

- soil amelioration
- growing system
- cultivar selection
- sowing
- planting

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- weed control
- crop nutrition
- crop support
- crop protection
- water management
- harvest

1.5 Describe the benefits of protected structures such as cold frames and cloches

1.6 Explain the importance of evidence-based decisions in productive growing

1.7 Apply principles of garden trials to productive growing

1.8 Explain the importance of planning and maintaining plant health in the cultivation of vegetables

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to cultivate top fruit

Assessment criteria

2.1 Explain the advantages and limitations of different growing systems, to include:

- wall trained
- open ground
- containers

2.2 Describe factors when planning a cropping schedule for top fruit, to include:

- selection of rootstock
- pollination group
- cultivar
- site

2.3 Describe factors when harvesting fruit, to include:

- ripeness testing
- picking
- storage

2.4 Demonstrate management of a range of top fruit, to include:

- tree management e.g. pruning
- weed control
- crop nutrition
- harvest

2.5 Describe the impact of site on the production of top fruit

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2.6 Explain how to manage risks to crop health

2.7 Explain how to implement findings of recent garden trials as they apply to the cultivation of top fruit

2.8 Explain the importance of planning and maintaining plant health in the cultivation of top fruit

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to cultivate soft fruit

Assessment criteria

3.1 Explain the advantages and limitations of different growing systems, to include:

- protected cropping
- containers
- open ground

3.2 Describe factors when planning a cropping schedule for soft fruit, to include:

- cultivar selection
- continuity of supply

3.3 Describe techniques for harvesting soft fruit

3.4 Produce a range of soft fruit, to include:

- soil amelioration
- growing system
- cultivar selection
- planting
- weed control
- crop nutrition
- crop support
- crop protection
- water management
- harvest

3.5 Describe the benefits of protected structures

3.6 Explain how to manage risks to crop health

3.7 Explain how to implement findings of recent garden trials as they apply to soft fruit production

3.8 Explain the importance of planning and maintaining plant health in the cultivation of soft fruit

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Amplification

AC 3.1 The term containers includes tabletop systems for strawberry production.

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to cultivate culinary herbs

Assessment criteria

4.1 Explain the advantages and limitations of different growing systems, to include:

- protected cultivation
- containers
- open ground

4.2 Describe factors when planning a herb garden, to include:

- space available
- cultivar/variety/species selection
- containment

4.3 Cultivate a range of culinary herbs, to include:

- cultivar selection
- sowing
- planting
- weed control
- crop nutrition
- harvest

4.4 Explain the benefits of protective growing structures for the propagation of young plants

4.5 Explain how to implement findings of recent garden trials as they apply to the cultivation of culinary herbs

Amplification

AC 4.2 Learners should be aware of the health and safety implications of some non-culinary herbs, e.g. *Ruta graveolens* are harmful to health.

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Unit 6 – Protected Growing

Unit aim

This unit covers the principles involved in the design, selection and maintenance of protected structures. Protected growing involves the cultivation of plants in protected structures, which may include productive and ornamental spaces.

Learners will understand characteristics of the different structures associated with protected growing along with how growing environments influence health and productivity of plants.

Learners will also consider the impacts that internal structures and equipment have on plant growth along with the development of blueprints to produce crops and the principles involved in the management of small plant collections.

Learners will also consider the wider impacts of protected growing on the environment.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand how to site, design and maintain protected structures

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe the range of protected structures used in horticulture, to include:

- cold frames
- polytunnels
- conservatories
- glasshouses

1.2 Explain the importance of placing a structure for maximum light

1.3 Explain the importance of placing a structure close to services e.g. water, electricity

1.4 Describe the maintenance requirements of different structures

1.5 Explain the advantages and limitations of materials used in protective structures e.g. wooden, aluminium and polythene clad structures, the use of glass or polycarbonate glazing

1.6 Maintain a range of protective structures, to include pre-season cleaning of structures for example greenhouses, polytunnels, cloches or cold frames

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1.7 Explain how the impacts of siting, design and maintenance of protective structures is considered with reference to plant health and sustainability

Learning outcome 2 - Understand internal structures and equipment

Assessment criteria

2.1 Describe the design elements of internal structures, to include:

- staging
- irrigation system
- paths
- raised beds

2.2 Describe types of environmental control systems, to include:

- heating
- ventilation
- shading
- lighting

2.3 Explain the benefits and limitations of internal structures and equipment on the growing environment e.g. reduced air circulation with capillary matting, impacts of structures on light transmission

2.4 Explain the growing requirements of a protected crop

2.5 Explain the impacts of poorly specified, designed and constructed structures and equipment on plant health and the management of the greenhouse environment

2.6 Describe the sustainability impacts of protected growing

Amplification

AC 2.5 For example, the impacts on cropping of poor light transmission or inadequate ventilation

AC 2.6 The impacts of protected cultivation on the environment should include specific reference to energy utilisation, water and plastic

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to produce crops

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe the principles of crop production within protected structures, to include:

- growing media
- container
- cultivar selection
- propagation
- environmental requirements
- crop support systems
- crop husbandry

3.2 Create a blueprint and produce an annual crop within a protected structure e.g. cut flowers, salad vegetables to include:

- growing media
- container
- cultivar selection
- propagation
- environmental requirements
- crop support systems
- crop husbandry

3.3 Describe the implication of the law of limiting factors on developing blueprints for crop production

3.4 Describe how to apply research and development to protected e.g. the use of LED supplementary lighting

Amplification

AC 3.2 Learners will produce a crop under protected structures, which can include traditional crops such as sweet peppers or tomatoes under glass, or the production of crops in cold frames or under cloches.

AC 3.3 The implications of the law of limiting factors is considered when producing cropping blueprints to consider the interplay between irrigation, nutrition, light and temperature.

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Learning outcome 4 – Be able to manage a plant collection

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the principles of managing a plant collection, to include:

- irrigation
- nutrition
- temperature
- light
- relative humidity
- labelling/recording
- husbandry

4.2 Manage a plant collection, to include:

- irrigation
- nutrition
- temperature
- light
- relative humidity
- labelling/recording
- husbandry

4.3 Explain the impact of plant collections on glasshouse management

4.4 Explain the importance of evidence-based decisions in managing small plant collections

4.5 Describe the impacts of plant collections on sustainability

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Unit 7 – Ecological and sustainable plantings

Unit aim

In this unit, learners will explore the purpose and use of ecological and sustainable plantings. They will understand how ecological plantings are characterised by dense interplanting, the tolerance of spontaneous plants and the simplicity of design. They will understand that plant selection includes a heavy reliance on seed grown plants for genetic diversity along with the introduction of plants with ecological benefits.

Learners will explore how the impacts of a changing climate mean that some native plants may no longer be seen as robust and resilient and the benefits of introducing plants of wider provenance or new species.

Learners will understand how these plantings provide ecological benefits and can facilitate specific environmental services such as integrating with sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and the creation of wildlife corridors. They will also explore how ecological principles can be applied to the benefit of people and communities.

Learning outcome 1 – Understand the purpose of ecological and sustainable plantings

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe the characteristics of ecological and sustainable plantings to include:

- aesthetics
- ecologically functioning e.g. seeding, spreading
- dense multi-layered plantings
- species in dynamic competition
- limited maintenance/interventions

1.2 Describe the benefits of ecological and sustainable plantings to include:

- ecological services e.g. supporting a wide range of invertebrates, wildlife corridors
- component of sustainable drainage systems e.g. plantings within swales and rain gardens
- reduced maintenance
- resilience to climate change

1.3 Describe the impacts of ecological plantings on traditional horticultural techniques including creating and maintaining planted areas

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Amplification

AC 1.1 These plantings are characterised by high aesthetic value and are ecologically functioning plant communities with species often self-seeding and spreading. The planting is dense and multi-layered, offering the widest range of invertebrate habitats. A further characteristic is low maintenance requirement once established.

Learning outcome 2 – Be able to select species

Assessment criteria

2.1 Describe the criteria for species selection within ecological and sustainable plantings, to include:

- aesthetics e.g. colour, form
- ecological services e.g. habitat, food source
- management e.g. nurse plants, reproductive capacity by seed

2.2 Use current published work and plant knowledge to inform species selection for use within ecological and sustainable plantings

2.3 Describe the impacts of the site on species selection

Learning outcome 3 – Be able to establish ecological and sustainable plantings

Assessment criteria

3.1 Describe the principles involved in the establishment of ecological and sustainable plantings, to include:

- site surveys
- soil amelioration
- techniques to establish plantings e.g. sowing, plants for planting
- planting density
- ratios of different growing habits
- perennial matrix style approaches

3.2 Explain how to establish an ecological and sustainable planting scheme

3.3 Describe the impacts of ecological plantings on traditional horticultural techniques including creating and maintaining planted areas

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Learning outcome 4 – Be able to maintain ecological and sustainable plantings

Assessment criteria

4.1 Describe the criteria for the maintenance of ecological and sustainable plantings, to include:

- monitoring
- species specific maintenance
- points of intervention
- annual maintenance e.g. cutting back/mowing.

4.2 Create a maintenance schedule for an ecological/sustainable planting

4.3 The impacts of ecological and sustainable plantings on garden management plans

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Unit 8 – Landscaping Materials

Unit aim

In this unit learners will explore how horticulturists manage and plan the maintenance of hard landscaping elements such as paths, terraces, non-porous and porous paved areas along with gravel and other hard surfaces.

They will understand how to inspect and report on the condition of landscaping elements, including weed control, presence of litter and broad aesthetics. As part of the inspection process, learners will understand how maintenance forms part of wider garden management plans.

Learners will also explore planning the refurbishment of surfaces and features or the installation of new ones. They will understand how plans include the implementation of sustainable urban drainage protocols (SuDS), the specification of materials and the calculation of quantity and cost.

Learning outcome 1 – Be able to inspect existing hard landscaping features

Assessment criteria

1.1 Describe the criteria for the evaluation of hard landscape features, to include:

- inspection intervals
- presence of defects
- presence of weed
- presence of litter
- presence of algae/organic debris

1.2 Inspect existing hard landscape features, to include:

- identifying condition
- health and safety considerations
- end of life removal/replacement

1.3 Describe the role of inspection within the management of other garden areas e.g. productive growing, protected structures and the maintenance of planted areas

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Learning outcome 2 – Be able to create maintenance plans and schedules for landscape materials and features

Assessment criteria

2.1 Explain the importance of key components of maintenance schedule for landscape materials and features

2.2 Identify a range of landscape surfaces and features, to include:

- paved areas
- gravel areas
- drainage systems
- porous paving
- non-porous paving

2.3 Describe maintenance procedures for landscaping surfaces and features, to include:

- snow and ice
- cleaning techniques
- weed removal techniques
- impacts of chemicals used (phytotoxicity)

2.4 Describe the advantages and limitations of maintenance processes, to include:

- snow and ice
- cleaning techniques
- weed removal techniques
- impacts of chemicals used (phytotoxicity)

2.5 Explain the ecological impact of maintenance processes

2.6 Create a maintenance schedule for hard landscaped areas, to include:

- surfaces and features
- inspection process
- maintenance techniques

2.7 Describe the impact on biodiversity of maintenance products/maintenance processes

2.8 Describe the impact of hard landscape maintenance on garden management plans

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Learning outcome 3 – Be able to plan a new hard landscaping feature

Assessment criteria

3.1 Plan the installation of a new hard landscaping feature to include consideration of:

- accessibility
- function
- site limitations
- levels
- materials
- aesthetics
- maintenance
- complexity of construction
- cost
- carbon footprint
- environmental impact

3.2 Assess the impact of a new hard landscape feature on other garden areas

Learning outcome 4 – Be able to select and calculate materials

Assessment criteria

4.1 Identify the materials required for the installation of a hard landscape feature e.g. a path, fence or raised bed

4.2 Calculate quantities and costs of materials, to include:

- minimum deliveries
- wastage
- all fixings

4.3 Describe how to conduct a cost benefit analysis

4.4 Explain the impacts of sustainable sourcing on materials selection and cost

Amplification

AC 4.2 as a part of their calculation of cost, learners will be expected to use provided printed materials as a basis for calculations. Learners are expected to consider the impact of minimum order quantities, wastage etc to provide accurate and realistic costings.

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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

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(economic viability, social equity and environmental protection)
- 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
7	16/09/2026	Clarification to the presentation of grade boundary percentages.

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