



Pass it on: gardening is a career to be proud of

RHS Vice President and broadcaster Alan Titchmarsh on promoting horticulture as a valued career



**NATIONAL
GARDENING
WEEK** 16 – 22 April 2012

I want to remind you, if you needed reminding, of the importance of gardeners and gardening. There are those who tend to underestimate that. And now is a good time for this reminder, as the first National Gardening Week takes place this month (see pp80–81).

In a 2011 speech about the Coalition Government's plans to allocate community work to the long-term unemployed, David Cameron grouped gardening as an unskilled activity along with litter picking. Not a particularly useful statement, is it? And that's the problem – many perceive gardening as 'tidying up'. The sort of thing that you do to your sock drawer once a year. But, as many of us know, it is so much more than that.

I took a friend round my garden last summer, and she said 'I love gardening; it's such an escape from reality'. I told her that gardening is reality. Plants come into leaf, magically, each spring. Every spring. The garden blooms; then leaves fade and fall in nature's grand clean-up. What my friend considered to be 'the real world' was one manufactured by man and whose self-inflicted problems were what amounted to reality. I am not denying the existence of the world's troubles; I'm just trying to put them into perspective and to express my passion for growing things and what good that can achieve.

The Prime Minister, and others, should consider just what part gardening can play in society. It impacts on those political hot potatoes, law and order, education and health. People who cultivate the soil, diverting their energy into productive pursuits are, it is proven, less likely to offend. The prison gardens that we have seen at RHS Flower Shows over the years reflect the rehabilitative properties of gardening.

Learning how things grow, from an early age (and here, the RHS Campaign for School Gardening comes to the fore) gives children a greater understanding of the wider environment and a greater responsibility for it. They will grow up with some affinity with the countryside, rather than living a life glued to mobile phones and computers.

I cannot help but hope that the raising of university tuition fees might have a beneficial side effect. Maybe we will realise that a university education is not the be-all and end-all in life. We need skilled craftsmen as well as academic brilliance. Apprenticeships should be more readily offered, and we should pay a decent wage to the skilled trades, including gardeners.

We need to encourage young people to make horticulture their career. How? By considering that it is a career. As a 15-year-old school leaver with just an Art O-level, I went to work (because all I wanted to do was grow things) as an apprentice at the local parks department nursery. I have never regretted going into horticulture, even if it has meant taking digs about decking.

Alan Bennett sums it up in his play *The History Boys* – the teacher explains to his pupils what education is all about. He says, 'Pass the parcel. That's sometimes all you can do. Take it, feel it and pass it on. Not for me, not for you, but for someone, somewhere, one day. Pass it on boys. That's the game I want you to learn. Pass it on.'

RHS / NEIL HEPPWORTH



'We should pay a decent wage to the skilled trades, including gardeners.'

We must all take our gardening knowledge, however slight, and pass it on. Only then will the importance and joy of growing things rub off on those

that follow. And without even mentioning carbon footprints, global warming and environmental awareness, we can be secure in the knowledge that our children will grow up with a greater respect for the natural riches that surround them, in a country that can boast the best gardens – and the finest gardening tradition – in the world. ●

*News Analysis:
careers in horticulture >>*

Fostering skills for a growing future

How can we bring new people into horticulture, and at the same time ensure that they have the right skills?

Author: **Anisa Gress**, News Editor, *The Garden*

The range of rich, challenging and fulfilling horticultural jobs comes into focus this month as part of the first RHS National Gardening Week (16–22 Apr). Those already involved appreciate the range of opportunities on offer but, ironically, it is the same wealth of choice that makes it hard to communicate to a new audience. ‘People do not appreciate what a fantastic and diverse career you can have in horticulture,’ said Jim Gardiner, RHS Director of Horticulture, ‘but because of this diversity it’s difficult to promote it as a one-size-fits-all career.’

According to Lantra (the UK Sector Skills Council for land based and environmental industries), more than half a million people are employed in horticulture. However, future employment requirements in the industry between 2010 and 2020, means a minimum of 2,000 new staff will be needed in production and 11,000 in amenity horticulture. Environmental conservation, which includes landscape management, will need some 36,000 more people. It is therefore vital enough skilled people are attracted to horticulture. Devising a career map is one of the ways the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) is working to promote the industry’s profile within its new strategy: *Recruit, develop, reward, retain: a strategy for developing people in the garden industry 2012–2014*. Penny Evans, HTA Training and Careers Manager, said the map (aimed at careers advisors, school

EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK 2010-2011		
Production horticulture (includes food production)	15,260 businesses;	116,300 people employed
Horticulture, landscaping and sports turf	17,870 businesses;	177,000 people employed
Floristry, including sales, design, delivery	9,700 businesses;	14,650 people employed
Environmental conservation	2,580 businesses;	73,300 people employed
Trees and timber including arboriculture, forestry	3,260 businesses;	21,700 people employed

leavers and those already working) will be a visual guide showing entry points into the industry, and progression routes within. ‘We hope it will provide another mechanism to promote career opportunities and help bridge the gap between industry and the world of education,’ she said.

Skill combinations
In the meantime, companies are struggling to find candidates with the right mix of practical, management and people skills. ‘At the RHS there are posts we cannot fill as we cannot get people with the combination of plant and people skills,’ said Jim Gardiner.

Similar sentiments come from Charles Carr, Nursery Director of the wholesale Lowaters Nursery, in Hampshire. ‘If we get good horticultural people, we grab them and don’t let go,’ he said. Part of the problem has arisen from college leavers having a lack

RHS COURSES: The RHS has made changes to its Master of Horticulture qualification. Production horticulture is now compulsory in the first year and operational and strategic management are covered. Visit: www.rhs.org.uk/courses



School leavers should be better informed about the range of opportunities in horticulture.

Some careers need a combination of artistic and horticultural skills.

An essential part of training is acquiring practical, hands-on skills.

of hands-on skills. This has occurred due to removal both of practical experience before attending college, and of mid-study placements. To compound this, Leigh Morris, Associate Director of Horticulture (Learning) at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, believes these students are then left wanting when it comes to careers advice. ‘We need to better equip them so they can focus on what they want to do next [such as training] or how to go about getting a job,’ he said. ‘The website growcareers is a great help but students need to think strategically to make their job happen.’ New staff, especially at managerial level, are not necessarily going to come from the UK, believes Guy Moreton, Director of specialist recruitment agency MorePeople. ‘The jobs are out

there,’ he said. ‘But in the next five to 10 years, we expect horticultural graduates from countries such as Poland to fill horticultural jobs in the UK.’ In recent years, the trade has identified two issues: a lack of people entering horticulture, and how they then develop and progress once working. The challenge is on to convince tomorrow’s professionals that horticulture is rewarding and a career worth pursuing. ●

More from the RHS Careers Day (18 Apr; see p81) at RHS Gardens includes forums with curators and local professionals. Speakers at the London event include Jekka McVicar, Andy Sturgeon and Cleve West. The RHS hosts a forum about careers at mygarden.rhs.org.uk

FOR MORE INFO VISIT: GROW Careers is an initiative set up by influential organisations within the horticulture industry to inform people about horticultural careers and the range of opportunities horticulture has to offer. www.growcareers.info See also: www.apprenticeships.org.uk and www.lantra.co.uk

Apprenticeships are good news for horticulture

Since 2002, more than 4,000 people have completed an apprenticeship in horticulture. It is a sector with one of the highest uptakes because it touches so many industries (sports turf through to food production) and it is UK-wide. Apprentices are gaining one to three years of practical, on-the-job skills, combined with theory from a local education provider. Currently they are trained to Apprenticeship Level 2 (equivalent to five good GCSE passes) and Level 3 (equivalent to two A-Level passes). Plans are being made to determine if horticultural businesses want higher, management-level (Level 4) apprenticeships. Over the coming year Lantra will be looking for industry response to gauge potential demand.

Industry support
In a bid to boost apprentice numbers, a new Government initiative is now offering small businesses in England and Wales £1,500 for each new applicant until March 2013. Horticultural industry groups,



including the RHS, are exploring ways of working with this new funding. The Garden Centre Group (which includes the Blooms chain) has already begun its apprenticeship scheme, comprising 165 places across 128 stores. Created with Pershore College of Horticulture in Worcestershire, it combines e-learning, college-based training and on-the-job experience. At the end of 12 months there is an option to undertake a higher-level apprenticeship linked to the company’s management development strategy.

Attracting school leavers

While traditional careers such as law and medicine remain popular choices, school leavers rarely appreciate the link between specific jobs and horticulture. Those who enjoy design do not always see garden design as an option, while those working in sports grounds may not appreciate the role of horticulture. Initiatives being developed to end this include:

- ✦ GROW Careers is an online resource (www.growcareers.info) to give information on careers, training courses and job vacancies in a way that students best relate to. Floristry and journalism, for example, come under Arts and Design.
- ✦ The Green Skills Initiative, set up by representatives from several sectors, is working with careers advisors to promote horticultural options. It is also looking for young horticulturists to return to their schools and share their career experience with current students.
- ✦ Several organisations in GROW Careers are using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to advertise apprenticeships and training opportunities.
- ✦ Information gained in the next two years via the HTA’s new strategy *Recruit, develop, reward, retain* will provide direction for helping to raise the industry’s profile to school leavers and career changers.