



RHS Qualifications

Examination:	RHS Level 3
Unit:	Unit 1
Examination date:	October 24

General Introductory Comments

Examiners' comments are produced by RHS Qualifications following each examination series.

The Examiner's comments included in this report are intended to help candidates and centres to develop an understanding of the requirements of the RHS Level 3 examinations. This is achieved through a review of candidate responses indicating key areas of strength, while also considering areas where candidates demonstrated a weaker understanding of Topic areas, or where there was evidence of gaps in their knowledge. It should be noted that the Level 3 October examination series has attracted a lower number of candidates than the February and June examination series. The lower number of candidates limits the range of candidate responses that are discussed in this report.

The RHS Level 3 examination papers are designed to assess the contents of the Qualification Specification according to Ofqual's level descriptors.

At Level 3 these state that candidates should:

- demonstrate factual, procedural, and theoretical knowledge
- be able to interpret, evaluate, and apply information and ideas
- be able to discuss a range of perspectives and approaches
- demonstrate the ability to resolve complex and non-routine problems
- review how effective methods and actions have been
- demonstrate responsibility for supervising or guiding others.

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To be able to achieve higher scores, candidates at Level 3 should be able to:

- demonstrate factual, procedural, and theoretical knowledge (AO1)
- interpret, evaluate, and apply information and ideas (AO2)
- discuss a range of perspectives and approaches (AO2)
- resolve complex and non-routine problems (AO2/AO3)
- demonstrate and apply holistic/integrated knowledge of the four Qualification-wide outcomes and the four Topic areas considered in Unit 1.

Overview of Examination

Levels of demand

Questions were set at three levels of demand within this paper.

Questions that require a recall of basic factual, procedural and theoretical knowledge are classified as being **low demand**.

Questions that require the interpretation, evaluation and application of knowledge are classified as **medium demand**.

Questions that require integrated thinking across topics, the resolution of complex and non-routine problems, and discussions on differing perspectives or approaches are classified as **high demand**.

General comments

The October 2024 examination series attracted a low number of candidates.

An analysis of scripts has indicated that there were no strong candidate responses, with candidates being graded as either pass or fail.

Candidates are advised that at Level 3 they should have a thorough knowledge of Unit 1 and Qualification-wide outcomes that are assessed in this examination. Candidates are expected to be able to:

- read and interpret information
- demonstrate a secure knowledge of UK legislation as it relates to horticultural practices
- summarise key concepts and ideas
- evaluate and apply horticultural practices
- discuss horticultural concepts from a range of informed perspectives
- apply their horticultural knowledge to new scenarios and situations
- provide full, detailed and well-structured long form responses in Section C
- integrate relevant Qualification-wide outcomes into long form responses
- provide logical responses
- develop coherent fact-based arguments.

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Qualification specification and Guidance Document

The Qualification specification outlines the curriculum that candidates will be examined on. A Guidance Document is freely available from Quartz and RHS Qualifications. This document was developed to provide centres with additional guidance with regards to the interpretation of the Assessment Outcomes in terms of breadth and depth that is appropriate to a Level 3 qualification.

It should be noted that the Guidance Document is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to teaching and learning. Instead, it is designed to provide examples of some of the key areas contained within an Assessment Outcome. As an example, where an Assessment Outcome in the Qualification Specification formally lists five areas that should be included, the Guidance Document may only unpack one of these areas as an example. The centre is then expected to apply the same level of breadth and depth provided in the exemplar to the other areas defined in the Assessment Outcome.

This document is updated annually each autumn.

RHS Qualifications will be publishing further guidance relating to Section C, (long form candidate responses) in early 2025. This document will include examples of high scoring candidate responses, along with an analysis of the attributes of a high scoring response.

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Section A

Questions 1 – 20

General comments on Section A

Forced answer questions are designed to test candidate's knowledge and understanding of the concepts covered in the four Topics and the four Qualification-wide outcomes that make up this unit.

At Level 3, these questions particularly relate to:

- the assessment of theoretical knowledge
- the ability to read and interpret information
- the ability to recall factual information
- the ability to apply knowledge to a range of simple scenarios
- the demonstration of procedural knowledge.

This section was well attempted by the majority of candidates, with a secure level of knowledge being displayed.

Candidates and centres are reminded of good examination technique with regards to forced answer questions:

- carefully read the question
- underline any key or important words
- score through inappropriate answers
- select the correct answer to be recorded on the response grid.

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Section B

Each question is considered separately.

Question 1

The question was designed to assess candidate knowledge and understanding of advanced plant propagation techniques.

In part a) candidates were required to name a specialist vegetative propagation technique.

Stronger candidate responses included T budding, micropropagation and serpentine layering.

Weaker candidate responses were less specific, and lacking the technical detail required at Level 3, for example stating grafting, without further developing their response to indicate the method/grafting technique, for example whip and tongue grafting.

In part b) candidates were required to name a plant that is propagated using the technique named in a).

Candidates who provided the full name of an appropriate plant were awarded the mark available. Candidates who only stated the genus in a plant name, were awarded a half mark, but only if the technique was applicable to all species within the stated genus.

In part c) candidates were required to state three reasons why the technique stated in a) is the preferred propagation technique for the plant listed in c).

Stronger candidate responses gave technically correct answers with the required level of detail, for example, in the case of serpentine layering, with *Wisteria sinensis* as the named plant, a strong response would include multiple plants can be produced from one stem.

Correct responses could have included that serpentine layering as well as producing a high yield of propagules, also has a high percentage success rate, and requires no specialist facilities, for example mist or fogging.

Incorrect candidate responses included the fact that the genetics of the parent plant and propagule will be the same. This is the case in all vegetative propagation and so is not a reason why the technique in a) is the favoured technique. Other incorrect responses included that the propagule received food and water from the parent plant. This statement is true of many propagation methods, and does not relate to the question, why is the technique in a) the favoured technique.

Question 2

This question was designed to assess candidate knowledge relating horticultural heritage, by asking candidates to respond to a quotation, comparing two named garden styles, to show how our attitudes to wilderness has changed.

Many candidates selected Mediaeval, as one of the garden styles, with Renaissance, English Landscape and Arts and Crafts as the second garden style. Some candidates selected Tudor gardens.

Stronger candidates clearly stated the attitude to wilderness within Mediaeval Gardens, with wilderness being something to be feared, that had to be excluded from the garden. These candidates then went on to compare the attitude to wilderness in other garden styles, for example discussing that styled versions of wilderness were often created to be framed in gardens, and that scientific discovery removed much of the fear from the concept of wilderness.

Weaker candidate responses were either incorrect or were too vague to be fully credited with marks.

Candidates gained a mark for naming the garden style correctly and then either one mark for a clearly stated point, or two marks for a clearly stated point which was appropriately developed, for each garden style.

Question 3

This question required candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of CITES.

In part a) candidates were required to state what the acronym CITES stands for. The Convention for the International Trade on Endangered Species being the correct answer.

In part b) of this question candidates were required to name two distinct plants covered by CITES regulations.

The term 'distinct' in this question requires candidates to select two plants that are not obviously related, i.e. from different genera. This requirement allows candidates to demonstrate a wider plant knowledge.

Any two appropriate plants, using their full scientific name, that are covered by CITES were accepted.

A considerable number of candidates lost marks on part b) by either naming plants that are not covered by CITES, or by not providing responses.

The qualification specification states, under the Qualification-wide outcome Best Practice (Bullet point 2) Professional use of named plant species in a wide range of horticultural settings. Candidates should therefore be prepared in a horticultural examination at Level 3 to be able to provide named plant examples to demonstrate their knowledge.

Part c) of the question required candidates to explain two distinct impacts that CITES has had on horticulture in the UK.

Stronger candidate responses included:

- it is more complex and problematic to trade in plant species covered by CITES
- it ensures sustainability by ensuring that endangered plants are not traded
- it ensures that endangered plants are propagated within the UK to preserve native populations
- UK nurseries have to understand the requirements of CITES to ensure compliance.

Weaker candidate responses often related to off topic (irrelevant) discussions relating to plant passports, other weaker candidate responses lacked the level of technical detail required at Level 3.

Question 4

This question related to staffing levels, and staff resource allocation within gardens.

The initial requirement on candidates was to name a garden area. The named area was required to give context to the candidate response, which was required during the marking process.

Some candidates incorrectly stated a garden (rather than a garden area), i.e. Great Dixter, rather than naming a garden area. Apart from not providing the required information, naming a garden with a broad range of garden areas did not provide the necessary context to the marker.

Questions often require candidates to name gardens and garden areas.

Candidates should be prepared to name a garden, if a question requires this.

Candidates should also be prepared to name garden areas, for example, lawns, productive gardens, or herbaceous borders.

Parts a) and b) of the question required candidates to discuss the impact of cultivation requirements on staff resources during different times of the year.

This was a low scoring question, which indicated significant gaps in knowledge. The majority of candidates were able to discuss the cultivation of the named garden area in spring/summer and autumn/winter but did not discuss the impacts of these cultivation requirements on staff resources. This limited the number of marks that could be awarded to a maximum of 4 marks out of a possible total of 8 marks.

Stronger candidates discussed, for example, the removal of protection from semi hardy plants, coinciding with the planting out of summer annual plants in a seasonal border in a public garden. One candidate, named some plant species appropriate to this scenario, for example, *Musa basjoo* before going on to develop their response by discussing the need, in a public garden setting, of carrying out these seasonal transitions swiftly, to maintain visitor interest. Finally, the candidate discussed how these peaks in staffing requirement impact on the allocation of staff resources, for example the employment of short term, seasonal staff. Other possible solutions could have been discussed for example, flexible working, with staff taking more time off (for annual leave) out of key seasons, to free up hours for busy periods.

Question 5

This question required candidates to demonstrate their applied knowledge of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in gardens. To provide a scaffold, the key principles contained within the Equalities Act (2010) were stated within the question.

In part a) of the question, candidates were required to list two additional ways (over and above those within the Equalities Act) that gardens could include to add value to the EDI offer.

A wide range of appropriate responses were provided by candidates to include:

- reduced entry prices for those on low incomes*
- inclusive Heritage interpretation
- catering for the needs of neurodivergent visitors
- considering the appropriateness of statues of prominent figures
- interpretation to communicate the role of slavery/colonisation in the development of the garden
- adjustments for neurodiverse staff
- hold specific days/events to target specific groups

In part b) candidates were required to explain how one of their answers within part a) could make the garden a better place to work and visit.

Strong responses were factual and reflected the depth of knowledge required at Level 3, for example, for the response in a) marked with an*, the candidate referred to the Office for National Statistics and a report suggesting heritage sites are deemed too expensive to visit by some people. Holding special days where entry is free, (or reduced) would allow those people entry into the garden.

Question 6

Part a) of this question required candidates to state two advantages of using scientific names for plants.

This part of the question was well answered by the majority of candidates.

A range of correct responses scoring full marks included:

- a universal, world-wide language
- common names are unreliable/often plants can have multiple common names
- scientific names can indicate plant characteristics
- scientific names can indicate similarities/relationships between plants, for example being of the same genus, but differing species.

Some weaker candidate responses repeated themselves, simply restating the first advantage as the second advantage.

Part b) of this question required candidates to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding, stating three distinct specific epithets that indicate and identify the correct habitat for the plant.

A range of correct responses scoring full marks included:

- alpina, from alpine regions
- montana, from a mountainous region
- pratensis, from a meadow
- maritima, from a coastal region.

Weaker or incorrect responses did not relate to the question, for example, grandiflora, large flowered, or hupehensis, from the Hupeh region of China were not accepted as they do not indicate and identify the correct habitat for the plant.

This demonstrates the importance of applying examination technique, candidates are advised that to gain maximum marks, they should fully read and respond to the requirements of the question.

Question 7

This question required the candidate to explain (using named plant examples) how focal points can be used in gardens. Candidates were further required to justify their answers.

Candidates are expected, at Level 3, to develop highly detailed, comprehensive and fully developed responses that address all key aspects of the question.

Strong candidate responses fully defined the concept of focal point, illustrated with well-considered plant examples using scientific names. The responses were well explained and justified.

Weaker candidate responses did not address the requirements of the question, either failing to include appropriate named plant examples or failing to justify the key components of their response. Other weaker responses simply named suitable plants with minimal additional information.

Question 8

This question was designed to assess the candidate's applied knowledge of Best Practice, one of the four Qualification-wide assessment outcomes. Candidates were specifically required to outline how our approach to gardening should change as a result of adopting Best Practice.

Stronger candidate responses correctly defined Best Practice. These responses gave specific and detailed examples of how gardening techniques might change as a result of applying Best Practice. For example, the raking and removal of leaves from shrub plantings, (which used to be considered to be Best Practice) has now changed with leaves being left, to allow them to decompose and be naturally incorporated into the soil. Some candidates discussed the role of specialist societies to inform the cultivation of specific plants for the first time, citing the Dahlia Society and Hardy Plant Society as reliable sources of information.

Weaker candidate responses were vague, lacked technical content, the appropriate level of detail, or provided a very simplistic understanding of Best Practice.

Section C

Section C candidate responses are graded against the assessment ladder, which is on the next page of this report. (This is the same ladder that is used in the Level 2 examinations.) Candidates and centres are advised to review the ladder as this indicates how the assessment decisions are made, when grading long form responses.

Candidate performance in Section C ranges from those candidates who:

- demonstrated their factual, procedural and theoretical knowledge
- were able to interpret, evaluate and apply relevant information and ideas
- were well prepared and able to produce long form responses
- could discuss relevant points from a range of perspectives
- could discuss a range of approaches
- approached the question logically
- demonstrated a full and holistic knowledge of the topic areas and Qualification-wide outcomes
- demonstrated mastery of the areas being assessed.

through to candidates who:

- produced brief responses which lacked the required level of detail
- provided responses which were unplanned and unstructured
- provided responses that gave a framework, but which did not provide the required level of detail
- picked up on certain words in the question, and wrote all they knew about these words, rather than answering the question.

In addition to the assessment ladder, candidate responses are also reviewed against the criteria set out below:

Indicative content

- Strength of response
- Integration
- Horticultural knowledge.

Strength of response

Strong candidate responses:

- developed a logical argument to answer the question
- drew on reliable information sources
- were relevant to the question
- expressed clarity of thought
- demonstrated knowledge of horticultural practices.

Integration

Candidate responses should integrate with other relevant areas of the syllabus.

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Assessment ladder (for information)

Band	Mark range	Summary	Description
4	12 - 15	Fully developed (Total)	<p>A highly detailed, comprehensive, fully relevant response, addressing all aspects of the question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No irrelevant or incorrect material or observations at the top end of the mark range: otherwise only very minor errors/omissions (which do not detract from an otherwise strong response) <input type="checkbox"/> Full integration/clear links demonstrated with other appropriate topics as required: a holistic approach <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated (and evidence of advanced material beyond the specification at the top end of mark range) <input type="checkbox"/> Consistent use of correct and appropriate technical language.
3	9 - 11	Mainly developed (Solid)	<p>A reasonably detailed and fairly comprehensive response, with mostly relevant observations, addressing most of the key elements of the question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Some minor evidence of irrelevant or incorrect material or observations (in what is otherwise a good response), with occasional lack of detail/omissions at times <input type="checkbox"/> Secure evidence of some appropriate integration with other topics but some linked topic areas are occasionally overlooked or incorrect associations are made: a partially holistic approach <input type="checkbox"/> Current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated most of the time, with occasional errors, but largely appropriate explanations and application <input type="checkbox"/> Correct and appropriate technical language demonstrated most of the time, with some minor errors.
2	6 - 8	Rudimentary (Basic)	<p>A largely basic response with some relevant observations, addressing some key elements of the question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Some significant evidence of irrelevant or incorrect material and frequent lack of detail, with some key areas overlooked <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional evidence of correct integration with other topics, but many areas are overlooked and incorrect associations made: little evidence of a holistic approach <input type="checkbox"/> Current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated some of the time, but with frequent errors, and only basic explanations or application <input type="checkbox"/> Correct and appropriate technical language only partially demonstrated but limited. Some key errors.
1	0 - 5	Undeveloped (Unsatisfactory)	<p>A largely poor response with few relevant observations, addressing few of the key elements of the question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Material is largely irrelevant or incorrect and lacking in any detail, with many key areas overlooked <input type="checkbox"/> No, or very little evidence of correct integration with other topics, with many areas overlooked and incorrect associations made: no evidence of a holistic approach <input type="checkbox"/> No or little evidence of current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated, with poor or incorrect explanations or application <input type="checkbox"/> Little (if any) technical language demonstrated. Often incorrect. Key errors.

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Question 1

This question required candidates to respond to the question 'What value does horticultural heritage offer to society?'

Candidate responses to this question were graded as being Band 1, or Band 2.

It is recommended that candidates practice answering questions of this nature. Candidates are further advised to consider their responses against the assessment ladder.

This was an open-ended question, and equal weighting was given to breadth of response, or depth of response.

Candidates were expected to be able to demonstrate an appropriate level of understanding and mastery of the area being assessed, consistent with Level 3.

The mark scheme, developed from the Qualification Specification and Guidance Document suggested five key areas for inclusion in candidate responses:

- economic benefit
- conservation
- national identity
- community
- storytelling

Economic benefit:

Stronger candidate responses should present up to date, factual information relating to the economic benefit of heritage in the UK, from sources that can include the Office of National Statistics, the National Trust, English Heritage or other reliable sources.

Weaker candidate responses tended to be vague, lacking in factual content, or provided a very simplistic, undeveloped understanding of the economic benefit of horticultural heritage.

Conservation:

Stronger candidate responses could integrate with the economic values of horticultural heritage, for example the strong economic impact of garden tourism. Stronger candidate responses could also identify, discuss and demonstrate knowledge of Heritage conservation; for example: the retention of the cultural significance of places, along with the balancing of the aesthetic, historic, scientific, spiritual, and social values held by past, present, and future generations.

Weaker candidate responses made reference to conservation, but at a basic level, with frequent lack of detail with many key areas overlooked.

National Identity:

Stronger candidate responses could discuss how historic buildings can symbolise important aspects of the nation's identity, perhaps with reference to named gardens. Candidates could also discuss concepts such as the recognition of inherited treasures from the peoples of the world, including, for example, wild collected plant species. Candidates could further develop their responses to reflect the importance of safeguarding cultural diversity.

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Weaker candidate responses often overlooked this area.

Community:

Stronger candidate responses could discuss areas where horticultural heritage and communities touch; for example, the importance of heritage sites such as the Commonwealth War Graves commission, or other symbolic or commemorative heritage sites including war memorials, statues and iconic landscapes. Other aspects of community that the candidate could relate to in their responses include heritage gardens around hotels, recreational venues and other cherished spaces. These spaces can be spiritual spaces, or special/sacred spaces for example the sycamore gap in Northumbria.

Weaker candidate responses often overlooked this area or were basic/undeveloped.

Storytelling:

Stronger candidate responses could make reference to the concept of inclusive histories, developing this area, for example, with reference to the National Trust's 'Challenging our History' project, or other similar initiatives to demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge for Level 3.

It is recommended that candidates practice answering examination questions to allow them to develop the skills of essay planning, providing a framework for their responses, and then developing this framework to demonstrate mastery of the topic.

Question 2

This question required candidates to discuss the impact that both exploration and its associated plant introductions have had on horticultural heritage.

Candidate responses to this question were graded as being within Bands 1- 3.

Stronger candidate responses provided a structured and factual overview of plant introductions, before considering their impact on horticultural heritage. Stronger candidates considered areas including wealth, the role of nurseries and scientific study. However key areas were also overlooked for example the role and impact of slavery, the concept of natural philosophy, or the introduction of invasive species.

Weaker candidate responses contained incorrect information, and overlooked key areas, including trade, natural philosophy, the role of nurseries, invasive species and inclusive histories. Weaker candidate responses often failed to integrate with other Qualification-wide outcomes, for example Equality and diversity.

It is recommended that candidates practice answering examination questions to allow them to develop the skills of essay planning, providing a framework for their responses, and then developing this framework to demonstrate mastery of the topic.

Question 3

This question required candidates to explain how a knowledge of plant procurement terminology and growing systems could inform sustainable plant procurement practices.

Candidate responses to this question were graded as being in either Band 1 or Band 3.

Stronger candidate responses demonstrated a knowledge of different growing systems, for example container grown, bare root, and the use of air pots. These candidates also discussed a range of terminology used within Hardy Nursery Stock, for example whips, feathered whips and standards. Consideration was then given to a range of sustainability issues, for example peat use, water and carbon footprints.

These responses could have been improved by considering a wider range of production systems, for example undercutting or field grown stock, and then considering for example the sustainability of field grown against container grown stock using a set of candidate derived criteria. This analysis would demonstrate a greater knowledge, applicable to Level 3 study.

Weaker candidate responses often went off topic, discussing the principles of right plant, right place, the use of apps to manage plant records, and the role of National Plant Collections. This resulted in considerable amounts of irrelevant information with the candidate responses, which had a negative impact on the grade awarded.

It is recommended that candidates practice answering examination questions to allow them to develop the skills of essay planning, providing a framework for their responses, and then developing this framework to demonstrate mastery of the topic.

Question 4

This question required candidates to create an annual propagation plan for a named plant.

Candidate responses to this question were graded as being in Band 1.

Rather than demonstrate a knowledge of annual propagation plans, and applying the knowledge to the named plant, most candidates gave a brief overview of how to propagate the named plant, with little appropriate depth of knowledge.

Candidates could have been graded at Band 4 if they had considered the following areas in detail:

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

With regards to areas such as resource requirement, candidates stated, for example sow in seed trainers. While assuming that the candidate was referring to roottrainers, there was no mention of cleanliness, or more significantly the growing media that should be selected, the compaction, or the water management, temperature requirements and other critical factors.

This demonstrated significant gaps in knowledge with regards to annual propagation plans.

It is recommended that candidates practice answering examination questions to allow them to develop the skills of essay planning, providing a framework for their responses, and then developing this framework to demonstrate mastery of the topic.