



RHS Qualifications

RHS Level 4 Diploma in Horticultural Practice

Qualification Specification

September 2025

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1. RHS Qualifications Contact Details

RHS Qualifications is the Awarding Organisation of the Royal Horticultural Society.

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UK

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Email: qualifications@rhs.org.uk

RHS website: www.rhs.org.uk

2. Equality and Diversity Policy Statement

RHS Qualifications is committed to policies that will promote equal opportunities in all its operations, regardless of age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation or any other factor.

RHS Qualifications is committed to ensuring that there is no unfair discrimination in any of its operations and will take into account all current legislation in relation to the equality of opportunity.

RHS Qualifications will constantly monitor and review its policies and practices pertaining to equal opportunities, to ensure that they remain consistent with its equal opportunities objectives and continue to comply with all relevant legislation.

RHS Qualifications will strive to make awareness of and respect for equality and diversity an integral part of the culture of the organisation.

A copy of the RHS Qualifications Equality and Diversity Policy is available on the Approved Centre Web Portal.

3. RHS Level 4 Diploma in Horticultural Practice

3.1 Introduction

The Level 4 Diploma in Horticultural Practice provides a route to employment in professional horticulture by assessing a wide range of horticultural knowledge and skills gained in a work-based environment within an RHS garden. It also provides a foundation for further learning or training in the field of horticulture

The RHS Level 4 Diploma in Horticultural Practice is offered solely by the RHS School of Horticulture and is only available to employees of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Qualification Accreditation Number: 603/0320/7

Qualification Level: Level 4

3.2 Total Qualification Time and Guided Learning Hours

The Guided Learning Hours (GLH) for this qualification are **298**. Guided Learning means the time spent under the direct supervision of a tutor or instructor. This includes classroom-based learning supervised by a tutor, practical instruction or supervised work-based learning and all forms of assessment carried out under the direct supervision of a tutor or instructor.

The Total Qualification Time (TQT) for this qualification is **1700**. TQT consists of Guided Learning Hours plus all time spent on activities under the direction, but not supervision, of a tutor or instructor. This includes independent research and learning, unsupervised coursework, and unsupervised work-based learning.

3.3 Teaching Pattern

The qualification is designed to be studied on a full-time basis between 1 September and 31 August at the RHS garden site RHS Wisley. Tuition takes the form of blocks of classroom based study, a structured programme of practical instruction and work-based learning in the garden, practical project work, and coursework.

3.4 Entry Requirements

Candidates must be employees of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Candidates must have successfully completed the RHS Level 3 Diploma in Horticultural Practice.

Candidates must be IT literate, with the ability to produce word processed coursework, work with digital images, access the internet and use email.

Candidates should have a full driving licence.

Before entry to the qualification, candidates must complete the RHS Induction and Core Skills module.

3.5 Qualification Structure

The qualification will be awarded to those candidates who successfully complete the following components:

Component	Level
Horticultural Management	4
Horticultural Taxonomy, Botany and Plantsmanship II	4
Plant Health II	4
Propagation and Protected Growing Environments	4
Ornamental Planting	4
Garden Design	4
Landscape Construction and Surveying	4
Research Project	4

3.6 Assessment

Assessment will take place throughout the course. A range of assessment methods will be used including:

- Practical competence assessments
- Coursework
- Skills Management Journal
- Practical project work
- Identification tests
- Work based assessment

3.7 Language

Assessments will be offered in English.

3.8 Learning Resources

There is a wide range of books 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 resources best support their studies, or to choose the most appropriate resources for their needs from the wealth of material available.

3.9 Grading

The qualification is graded using marks and weighting. The qualification is graded as:

Fail 0 – 49.9%
Pass 50 – 59.9 %
Merit 60 – 69.9 %
Distinction 70+ %

Although the work-based learning element of the qualification must be successfully completed in order to pass the qualification, the grading is derived from the assessment tasks set within the components

4. Approved Centres

This qualification is only offered by the RHS School of Horticulture to employees of the Royal Horticultural Society.

5. Candidate Registration

Candidates should be registered for the qualification through the RHS Qualifications Web Portal.

6 Reasonable Adjustments

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

Full guidance is provided in the document 'Guidance to Centres for Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration'. The document is available on the RHS website (www.rhs.org.uk), the RHS Qualifications Approved Centre Web Portal, or can be obtained from RHS Qualifications.

Applications for reasonable adjustment must be made by the Approved Centre on behalf of the candidate. Application must be made within specified timescales.

7. Replacement Certificate (if lost, damaged or destroyed)

Replacement certificates can be obtained from the RHS Qualifications Department. A fee is payable for this service.

8. Appeals Procedure

An Appeals procedure exists to conduct appeals lodged by candidates against decisions made by RHS Qualifications, concerning their performance, the granting of an award and/or the closure of their entry to an award on academic grounds.

The procedure is also followed in cases where there is irregularity or malpractice in the conduct of assessment and where RHS Qualifications has imposed a penalty on a candidate.

A copy of the procedure is available on the RHS Qualifications Web Portal and on the RHS website.

9. Policy on Malpractice and Maladministration

Malpractice consists of those acts which undermine the integrity and validity of the assessment or examination, the certification of qualifications and/or damage the authority of those responsible for conducting the assessment, examination and certification.

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 candidates 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.

10. Qualification Components	
Horticultural Management	
Component Level: 4	
<p>Component Overview: This component covers some of the requirements of how to successfully manage a garden throughout the year. This component covers business practices, people management, health and safety, the environment and various further skills increasingly necessary for the successful running of a public garden.</p>	
Learning Outcomes The learner will:	Assessment Criteria The learner can:
1 Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of managerial operations and processes within a public garden context.	1.1 Assess the management requirements of a range of horticultural areas.
	1.2 Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the legal and organisational responsibilities in relation to health, safety and security in a public garden context.
	1.3 Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how sustainability influences business practices in a public garden context.
	1.4 Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the importance of budget management, grants and fundraising.
	1.5 Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how investment in certain areas can help the business to reach functional objectives.
	1.6 Apply operational objectives and targets of quality, cost, innovation, efficiency (including time) and environmental factors.
	1.7 Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of different ways to recruit an effective and motivated workforce in a public garden context.
2 Be able to select and use a variety of methods, skills and management techniques within a public garden context in order to manage a range of sites/ environments throughout the year.	2.1 Produce management and maintenance plans for specified periods of time.

3	Be able to document, analyse and interpret horticultural information and apply understanding to the management of a public garden.	3.1	Develop workforce plans and match workforce skills to business needs.
		3.2	Evaluate the potential and limitations of a range of horticultural methods and techniques in a public garden context.
		3.3	Assess the long term effects of decisions.
		3.4	Use a range of skills and techniques to document, analyse interpret and communicate information.
4	Understand and manage the potential hazards and risks associated with horticultural operations in a public garden.	4.1	Define risks associated with the selected operations.
		4.2	Assess the hazards associated with the selected operations, and implement appropriate measures to minimise risk.
		4.3	Promote environmental good practice.
		4.4	Work in a way which promotes health and safety and is consistent with current legislation, codes of practice and any additional requirements.
		4.5	Maintain effective working relationships with all relevant people.

Horticultural Taxonomy, Botany and Plantsmanship II

Component Level: 4

Component Overview:

Further knowledge of horticultural taxonomy and botany including a more in-depth look at plant families including phenotypes and genetics. The component also covers the problems of alien species, and the purpose and future of herbariums and seed banks.

Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:	
1	Be able to interpret horticultural information and apply understanding of nomenclature and taxonomy in the naming of plants.	1.1	Apply the botanical naming system of plants, using specialist vocabulary.
		1.2	Develop and apply understanding of the role of the scientific/ horticultural community in validating new knowledge.
		1.3	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of differences in approach for the classification of plants, with reference to international conventions and legislation.
		1.4	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of other influences in the classification of plants.
2	Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the use of structure and morphological characteristics in the identification of plants, and the application of genetic fingerprinting.	2.1	Document, record and present information clearly and coherently using specialist vocabulary, where appropriate.
		2.2	Identify a range of plants and know their characteristics and decorative merits.
		2.3	Collect and analyse data relating to variation.
		2.4	Explain the use of genetic fingerprints in plant breeding.
3	Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of plant taxonomy and nomenclature to identify a wide range of plants and to know their characteristics.	3.1	Organise and communicate information clearly and coherently using specialist vocabulary.
		3.2	Identify a range of plants from their characteristics and decorative merits.

		3.3	Identify a range of weeds and invasive plants and know their characteristics.
4	Interpret horticultural information and demonstrate understanding for the conservation of plants and habitats.	4.1	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of variation and the influence of genetic and environmental factors.
		4.2	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of scientific arguments and ideas for the use of herbariums and their future role in the conservation of species and habitats.
		4.3	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of scientific arguments and ideas for the use of seed banks and their future role in the conservation of species and habitats.
		4.4	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the classification of, and issues related to the control of alien species.

Plant Health II		
Component Level: 4		
Component Overview: Further study on plant health and the current issues facing horticulture. The component covers biosecurity, risk analysis, integrated pest management, and phytosanitary concerns.		
Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:
1 Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of plant health to the management of horticultural operations and processes.	1.1	Identify a broad range of pests, diseases and disorders and know their characteristics and appropriate methods of control.
	1.2	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the potential and limitations surrounding the control of pests, diseases and disorders within a public garden context.
	1.3	Develop and apply understanding of pest and disease management strategies and how they interact, within a public garden context.
	1.4	Develop and apply understanding of integrated pest management approaches to reducing the risks associated with the introduction and establishment of pests and diseases.
	1.5	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the importance of phytosanitary measures applied to plants imported into a public garden context.
2 Be able to implement an integrated approach to the control and monitoring of pests, disease and disorder on specified sites within a public garden context.	2.1	Select and use appropriate personal protective equipment and clothing for the task.
	2.2	Select and use effectively a range of tools and equipment for the task.
	2.3	Clean and appropriately store tools equipment and materials after use.
	2.4	Facilitate integrated approaches to overall pest management and plant health in a public garden context.
	2.5	Develop and apply monitoring systems for the prevention of pests and diseases in a public garden context.

3	Be able to interpret scientific information and regulatory requirements in order to apply plant health management to a public garden context.	3.1	Interpret and apply specific care requirements for plant collections to anticipate and keep pace with changing threats.
		3.2	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how stresses caused by climate and changes in land use can increase the risk of pest, disease and establishment, spread and impact.
		3.3	Apply requirements of quarantine within a public garden context.
		3.4	Apply international/ national requirements, biosecurity and plant health regulations in the protection of plants for a public garden context.
		3.5	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the effect of legislation changes on the use of chemicals and plant protection products.
4	Understand the potential hazards and risks associated with the management of plant health in a public garden context.	4.1	Promote environmental good practice.
		4.2	Work in a way which maintains health and safety and is consistent with current legislation, codes of practice and any additional requirements.
		4.3	Plan methods of control to protect plants which are proportionate and targeted to make best use of the resources available.
		4.4	Identify risks and hazards, and implement appropriate measures to minimise risks.
		4.5	Use contingency planning to predict, monitor, and control the spread of pests and diseases, including those identified through risk registers.

Propagation and Protected Growing Environments			
Component Level: 4			
Component Overview: Further propagation techniques covering growing plants under glass, including technology and specimen management.			
Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:	
1	Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of managerial operations and processes within protected growing environments.	1.1	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the management requirements of a range of plants within protected growing environments.
		1.2	Apply knowledge and understanding of methods of controlling water relations, irrigation, enhancing temperature, carbon dioxide concentration and light intensity within protected growing environments.
		1.3	Apply international/ national requirements, biosecurity and plant health regulations within protected growing environments.
2	Be able to select and use a variety of propagation methods, skills and techniques within a public garden context.	2.1	Select and use a range of propagation techniques for a public garden context.
		2.2	Select and use protected growing environments for successful propagation.
		2.3	Manipulate protected growing environments for successful production.
3	Be able to document, analyse and interpret horticultural information and apply understanding to the management of protected growing environments within a public garden context.	3.1	Evaluate the benefits and limitations of different methods of water management, irrigation, enhancing temperature, carbon dioxide concentration and lighting within a public garden context.
		3.2	Assess environmental issues arising from enhancement of productivity.
		3.3	Use a range of techniques to document, analyse and interpret information for successful stock management.
		3.4	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the value of new scientific discoveries and new technologies, and the practical application of those discoveries to propagation and protected growing.

4	Understand and manage the potential hazards and risks associated with propagation and protective growing environments in a public garden context.	4.1	Define risks associated with the selected operations.
		4.2	Assess the hazards associated with the selected operations and implement appropriate actions to minimise risks.
		4.3	Promote environmental good practice.
		4.4	Work in a way which promotes health and safety and is consistent with current legislation, codes of practice and any additional requirements.

Ornamental Planting			
Component Level: 4			
Component Overview: This component covers different styles of ornamental planting and the issues associated with each. This component covers how to design planting schemes with good plantsmanship in mind, and how to best maintain areas with different planting styles.			
Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:	
1	Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of operations and processes for the management of a variety of ornamental planting styles within a public garden context.	1.1	Assess the management requirements of a range of ornamental planting styles.
		1.2	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how budgets influence the quality, cost and creativity used in public garden planting schemes.
		1.3	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how the wider objectives of a public garden influence the choices of planting scheme designs.
		1.4	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the application of design principles and practices for ornamental planting schemes.
2	Be able to select and use a variety of methods, skills and techniques for the implementation and management of ornamental planting within a public garden context.	2.1	Produce designs for suitable planting schemes for a range of sites/ specified sites within a public garden context, including the correct use of symbols, scale and nomenclature.
		2.2	Source suitable plants for ornamental planting schemes for a public garden context.
		2.3	Select and use a range of plants suitable for ornamental planting schemes for specified sites.
		2.4	Produce management and maintenance plans for ornamental planting schemes for specified sites.
3	Be able to document, analyse and interpret horticultural information and apply understanding to ornamental planting in a public garden context.	3.1	Use a range of skills and techniques to document, analyse interpret a range of ornamental planting schemes.
		3.2	Use a range of techniques to design planting schemes for specified areas.

		3.3	Evaluate the contribution of a range of soft-landscaping features to the overall design and function of a site.
		3.4	Evaluate the benefits and limitations of a range of different ornamental planting styles and their application within a public garden context.
		3.5	Evaluate the decorative merits, height, spread and the site requirements of a selection of plants for ornamental planting schemes.

Garden Design		
Component Level: 4		
Component Overview: This component covers garden design and project management and includes design knowledge and awareness, drawing skills, budgeting and spatial management.		
Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:
1 Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of garden design principles to a public garden context.	1.1	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the principles and practices of garden design within public garden contexts.
	1.2	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how budgets influence the quality, cost and creativity of garden design.
	1.3	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how the wider objectives of a public garden influence garden design.
	1.4	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the changing role and function of public garden spaces over time.
	1.5	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how spatial management works within a public garden context.
	1.6	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how health and other social impacts influence the function and design of public gardens.
	1.7	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how to create plans for new garden spaces using design principles.
	1.8	Develop and apply knowledge and understanding of how to project manage the implementation of a garden design.
2 Be able to document, analyse and interpret information and apply understanding to garden design within a public garden.	2.1	Consider ethical perspectives, moral and environmental issues arising from shifts in value placed on garden design.
	2.2	Identify, select and collect evidence from a range of different sources (Primary and secondary).

		2.3	Assess how historical perspectives within science and technology have shaped garden function and design.
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Landscape Construction and Surveying			
Component Level: 4			
Component Overview: This component concentrates on the skills needed to implement new planting schemes and designs. This component will cover initial site surveys, landscape detailing, hard landscaping knowledge and skills.			
Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:	
1	Be able to apply knowledge and understanding of landscape construction and surveying operations and processes within a public garden context.	1.1	Develop and apply knowledge of the practical procedures for setting out a site to scale plans and drawings.
		1.2	Apply knowledge of the materials and construction procedures for a range of hard landscaping uses.
		1.3	Apply knowledge of the materials and construction procedures for steps and ramps.
		1.4	Apply Knowledge of the materials and construction procedures for low garden walls, retaining walls, fences and pergolas.
		1.5	Apply Knowledge of the materials and construction procedures for a water feature.
		1.6	Apply Knowledge of the function of drainage systems within a given site.
2	Be able to select and use a variety of methods, skills and management techniques within a public garden context.	2.1	Carry out a range of basic survey techniques.
		2.2	Produce scale drawings using survey data, including the correct use of symbols, scale and nomenclature.
		2.3	Identify a range of resources and consider alternative solutions, where appropriate.
		2.4	Outline specification requirements for landscaping projects with contractors.
		2.5	Carry out the construction of a range of landscaping features.

3	Understand the potential hazards and risks associated with landscape construction operations in a public garden context.	3.1	Define risks associated with the selected operations.
		3.2	Assess the hazards associated with the selected operations, and implement appropriate actions to minimise risks.
		3.3	Promote environmental good practice.
		3.4	Work in a way which promotes health and safety and is consistent with current legislation, codes of practice and any additional requirements.

Research Project		
Component Level: 4		
Component Overview: This component consists of learning around an approved subject area of choice. The product will be a thoroughly researched project containing critical thought, interpretation and analysis. This component also requires a presentation of the approved subject area of choice.		
Learning Outcomes The learner will:		Assessment Criteria The learner can:
1	Be able to research and select relevant horticultural information from a range of sources and present knowledge and understanding of the subject area.	1.1 Construct a clear rationale for the subject area, setting out parameters and methodology to be used.
		1.2 Select, record and present information clearly and coherently using specialist vocabulary, where appropriate.
		1.3 Identify, collect and select evidence from a range of different sources (Primary and secondary).
		1.4 Correctly reference sources for all information used.
2	Be able to document, analyse and interpret complex information and apply understanding.	2.1 Use a range of skills and techniques to document, analyse, interpret and communicate information.
		2.2 Discuss the relevance and significance of information selected.
		2.3 Interpret, analyse and evaluate ideas and arguments presented.
		2.4 Critically compare and analyse arguments and explanations to verify statements and substantiate conclusions.
		2.5 Construct clear reasoned judgements and decisions.