



Royal
Botanic Garden
Edinburgh

RHS Level 2 Certificate in the Principles of Horticulture 2021



Introduction to the course

Welcome

We are delighted that you are considering joining the RHS Level 2 Certificate in the Principles of Horticulture course here at RBGE.

The RHS Level 2 Certificate in the Principles of Horticulture is the most widely regarded entry-level horticulture course. It is suitable for anyone with a passion for plants and gardens who wants to develop their knowledge. The certificate delivers a broad-based understanding of horticultural techniques and plant biology and provides you with a qualification that is recognised internationally by the horticulture industry. This broad base makes it the ideal starting point or first qualification for those wishing to pursue a career or business in any branch of horticulture or garden design. It is also perfect for leisure gardeners who would like to expand their horticultural knowledge, and to have it formally assessed.

The award of the Certificate is based on written examinations. These are externally set and marked by the RHS. The certificate is accredited by OFQUAL (The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) in England and Wales.

When you complete the course, you may be able to look at developing your skills to the highest level through RBGE's HND or BSc in Horticulture with Plantsmanship.

This handbook introduces you to the RHS Level 2 course content and structure. We hope it answers all your questions, but please don't hesitate to contact us via the details below if you have any further queries.



Royal
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Education Department
rhslevel2@rbge.org.uk

All information is correct at the time of publication and is subject to change.

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1. Course structure and format

The RHS Level 2 course is aimed towards the examinations set by the RHS, so the content is predominantly theory. We provide you with a complete set of information and learning support to help you pass the exams.

The course is broken down into two separate certificates that are designed to stand alone. When combined, they make up the *RHS Level 2 Certificate in the Principles of Horticulture*.

A third practical certificate is also available and when combined with the theory certificates makes up the *RHS Level 2 Diploma in the Principles and Practices of Horticulture*. RBGE does not offer the practical certificate, if you wish to find your nearest centre please use the [Find a Centre](#) tool on the RHS website.

Despite the current climate, we are delighted to have continued to be able to offer this nationally accredited course in a format which meets the changing world and our online option continues to offer the most flexibility. We hope that even if your original interest was towards the attended course, you may consider the online programme as a suitable alternative. Please rest assured that both courses provide you with everything you need to know to pass the exams in order to gain the qualification (if this is your chosen path), although increasingly students are choosing to complete this course for personal interest and it is important to note that there is no obligation to complete any exams as part of this course.

2. Course completion deadline

Due to changes to the RHS qualifications, the last exam offering for this version of the qualification will be in February 2023.

By signing up for this course you are acknowledging that you must complete the course by this time in order to gain the qualification.

RBGE will continue to keep the resources up to date and offer support for the current version of the qualification through to the last set of exams. There will be no need for students to register and pay for the new qualification when it launches unless they have not completed by February 2023.

3. Certificate 1: Principles of Plant Growth, Propagation and Development

3.1 Introduction to the certificate

This certificate focuses on many of the processes that go on 'behind the scenes' in a plant. These are the fundamentals that help everything else make sense in plants when you are working with them in the garden.

3.2 Learning hours and QCF credits

Unit	Guided learning hours	Additional Self-directed studies in hours	Total Qualification Time*	QCF Credits^
R2101: Plant classification, structure and function	31	24	55	5
R2102: Plant nutrition and the root environment	23	12	35	3
R2103: Maintaining plant health	22	12	34	3
R2104: Understanding plant propagation	23	12	35	3

*The RHS have estimated that the Total Qualification Time required for students to study this certificate is 159 hours. We have apportioned the number of hours required for each unit based on the guided learning hours.

^The total number of QCF credits for this Certificate is 14 Credits.

3.3 Unit Descriptors

R2101: Plant classification, structure and function

This unit provides a solid grounding in basic botany. Considerable time is devoted to understanding the structures and processes that allow plants to survive – from the cellular level right through to the myriad variety of leaves, flowers and fruits that make horticultural plants so interesting. Whilst there is a considerable amount of technical botanical information in this unit, it is geared towards real-life situations, making it easy to understand and apply in gardening and wider horticultural contexts.

R2102: Plant nutrition and the root environment

One of the keys to maintaining healthy plants is, of course, an understanding of plant nutrition. This unit works through plant nutrition from first principles. We cover soil structure and properties – both mineral and organic, as well as looking at the fauna and microflora that the soil harbours and the ways in which these organisms interact with each other, the soil, and the plants growing there. Soil management is an important part of this unit, so we also look at how to use the right compost, fertilizer or mulch for the job.

R2103: Maintaining plant health

This unit discusses weeds, pests and diseases and their control. As well as this, we cover plant physiological problems – such as the effects of nutrient deficiencies, drought, overwatering and excessive sun and shade.

R2104: Understanding plant propagation

Successful, safe propagation is one of the fundamental skills for the horticulturist and gardener. This unit covers propagation, both from seed and using vegetative methods. We discuss the relative merits and disadvantages of each type of propagation and which is the most appropriate for each plant or group of plants. Vegetative propagation includes learning about techniques such as cuttings, layering and grafting, as well as care and safe use of the tools and equipment needed to do the job.

4. Certificate 2: Principles of Garden Planning, Establishment and Maintenance

4.1 Introduction to the certificate

This certificate focuses on gardens and the huge diversity of plants and other materials available to the gardener. Emphasis is placed on the selection and maintenance of plants, with a great deal of information from the first certificate feeding in to support this one.

4.2 Learning hours and QCF credits

Unit	Guided learning hours	Additional Self-directed studies in hours	Total Qualification Time*	QCF Credits^
R2111: Understanding garden features, plant selection and planning	29	26	55	5
R2112: Understanding the choice, establishment and maintenance of gardens plants and lawns	22	11	33	3
R2113: Understanding the production of outdoor vegetables and fruit	23	11	34	3
R2114: Understanding protected environments and their use in plant cultivation	23	11	34	3

*The RHS have estimated that the Total Qualification Time required for students to study this certificate is 156 hours. We have apportioned the number of hours required for each unit based on the guided learning hours.

^The total number of QCF credits for this Certificate is 14 Credits.

4.3 Unit Descriptors

R2111: Understanding garden features, plant selection and maintenance

This unit is an introduction to the principles of garden design, from site analysis and identification of purpose and potential, through surveying, to putting together the actual designs. Garden styles, materials and the initial processes of bed layouts are discussed. Soft landscaping and the selection of plants is then introduced with an opportunity to learn about a huge range of horticulturally significant plants – something for every situation – and this theme continues into the next unit.

R2112: Understanding the choice, establishment and maintenance of garden plants and lawns

Continuing on from the previous unit we look at how to select plants for whatever job you have in mind. Everyone will be able to bring some of their own knowledge to this unit as we cover the following topics:

1. Annuals and herbaceous perennials appropriate for bedding, borders and baskets. We also look at the different ways in which to organise these planting schemes for any garden situation.
2. Woody plants are a very large group, encompassing ornamental trees, shrubs, climbers, hedging plants and ground cover.
3. Lawns and turfing, including choice of plants, establishment of lawns, and annual care.
4. Alpine and rock garden plants and choosing and growing these specialised plants.
5. Planting and maintaining a garden pool.

R2113: Understanding the production of outdoor vegetables and fruit

Whether you are cultivating fruit, vegetables, or both, food crops are one of the most rewarding groups of plants to grow. This unit provides an overview of the most common food garden and smallholding plants grown in the UK and similar climates. Groups include tree, bush and cane fruits such as apples, currants and raspberries, soft fruits (e.g. strawberries) and a wide range of vegetables such as peas, brassicas, lettuces and carrots. Cultivation strategies and timing, as well as pest control are important elements of this unit. We also discuss the broader theory behind site selection, crop rotation, making beds and soil cultivation.

R2114: Understanding protected environments and their use in plant cultivation

Protected cultivation covers a diverse range of techniques used to cultivate plants in a protected environment. This unit covers the whole spectrum, from simple container grown plants through to cultivation of plants in glasshouses, conservatories and indoors. We look at the ways in which these forms of protected cultivation differ from each other and from the outdoor environment.

5. Examinations

Each unit will be assessed by a separate written examination covering the learning outcomes specified in that unit. The dates and times of the exams are set by the RHS and are usually offered twice a year, in February and June. Please note that due to the Covid-19 pandemic the dates for 2021 have been altered.

The exams are a good challenge, and the qualification is one of the reasons many people join the course. However, the course is designed to be great fun and a valuable learning experience even if you do not do the exams, so there is no obligation to sit them.

Exam spaces are limited across the country and RBGE cannot be held responsible if you are unable to secure a space to sit exams.

5.1 Sitting the exams at RBGE

Due to capacity limits RBGE are only able to accept exam registrations from students in Scotland, Northern Ireland and UK based applicants in and north of Newcastle. However please note that this will not guarantee you a space for the exams. Registrations are usually processed on a first come first served basis.

If you live in the RBGE catchment area and can sit the exams elsewhere, please consider this option to give those without other options the chance to sit the exams locally.

5.2 Sitting the exams elsewhere

It is possible to study with RBGE and sit the exams elsewhere, however we advise ensuring you will be able to sit the exams at a local centre **before** signing up for the course.

You should contact your local centre to find out how and when to register for the exams, each centre will have their own system in place.

If you need to find an exam centre near you please check the [RHS External Candidate Centre List](#).

5.3 Sitting exams outside of the UK

It is possible to arrange to sit the exams locally if you do not live in the UK. This does come with some extra logistical arrangements and is also include some additional costs.

Students should enquire about the possibility directly with the RHS: qualifications@rhs.org.uk

5.4 Exam fees

The RHS registration fee for the exams is £18 per unit, the total cost to sit all 8 units is £144. These fees are **not** included in the course fee.

- If you are absent on the day of the exam, you lose your fee. You will have to re-register and pay again to sit the exam(s) you have missed.
- If you need to re-sit any exams you must re-register and will have to pay again to sit the exam(s).
- Some centres may charge external candidates an administration fee on top of the RHS registration fee.

5.5 Examination dates in 2021

June 2021

(registration for the June exams may be difficult due to cancellation of the February exams. Registrations have been rolled over to June and many centres may be fully booked)

Certificate 1

Monday 21st June 2021

- R2101 9:00 – 10:20
- R2102 11:20 – 12:10
- R2103 13:30 – 14:20
- R2104 15:20 – 16:10

Certificate 2

Tuesday 22nd June 2021

- R2111 9:00 – 10:20
- R2112 11:20 – 12:10
- R2113 13:30 – 14:20
- R2114 15:20 – 16:10

October 2021

Certificate 1

Monday 4th October 2021

- R2101 9:00 – 10:20
- R2102 11:20 – 12:10
- R2103 13:30 – 14:20
- R2104 15:20 – 16:10

Certificate 2

Tuesday 5th October 2021

- R2111 9:00 – 10:20
- R2112 11:20 – 12:10
- R2113 13:30 – 14:20
- R2114 15:20 – 16:10

These dates and times are dependent on lockdown restrictions lifting and will be subject to change.

Exam dates for 2022 have not been released by the RHS.

5.6 Examination dates and enrolment periods

It is possible to sit exams outside of your enrolment period, it just means you will no longer have access to the course materials on PropaGate. However, it is possible to extend your online support period should you wish to retain access until you have completed the exams.

Extension fees:

- 1 month extension £10
- 3 month extension £25
- 6 month extension £50

6. How does it work?

6.1 Learning Online

Your online learning environment is PropaGate Learning which uses the Moodle learning platform.

PropaGate Learning is a website that you log into in order to access your course. It's a place for learning and for discussing topics and progress with your tutors and other students. PropaGate Learning allows you to study from home, whilst becoming part of a thriving and enthusiastic learning community.

Your course will consist of a number of elements which include e-books, PDFs, presentations, videos, interactive lessons, quizzes, discussion forums and links to useful websites.

We continually review and update the course and we are in the final stages of updating the course with more videos and interactive lessons. We are also updating the course to ensure it is more accessible.

6.2 How can I prepare for studying online?

You should be a competent computer user with a basic understanding of standard computer applications such as using an internet browser, email and word processing. Experience of participating in online forums would also be a benefit, but not essential.

Our '[Digital Skills Check](#)' will help you to identify any areas of IT you may need to brush up on.

When you are first given access to PropaGate Learning, please take time to complete the Orientation Activity. This will give you an essential introduction to the tutors on your course, finding your way around, advice on learning independently and the best ways to communicate with tutors and other students.

Online courses require a much more self-motivated learning style than traditional attended classes. You should plan to set aside a certain amount of time each week to log into the course lessons and carry out activities. The amount of time required depends on the number of units you are studying at a time, however we suggest 2-3 hours per week for 6 months if you want to take 2 exams at the end of that 6 months. Participation in online discussions is also a key part of the course - online learning is much more sociable than you might think!

6.3 What hardware or software will I need?

You will need access to a desktop or laptop computer. Most of the course will be accessible via a tablet, but we recommend using a laptop or desktop computer. You may find some aspects of the course will be easier to use on a computer.

Regarding software, you will need an up-to-date browser (We recommend Firefox, Chrome or Safari). You will also need software that will open PDFs (e.g. Adobe Acrobat Reader).

Most importantly you will need a **reliable strong internet connection**.

PropaGate Learning is available 24/7 with the exception of any maintenance work which we will inform you about in plenty of time.

6.4 What support is available?

We encourage everyone to make the most of the forums on the course. These provide a way for students to talk to one another and to tutors and ask each other questions. They are also used by us to share information about exam registration and other course-related news.

Tutors check the forums at regular intervals and will usually reply to forum queries within 2 working days.

Our PropaGate Learning team are always available so if you ever feel you are stuck with a course-related technical problem, they can be contacted via the forums or by emailing: propagatelearning@rbge.org.uk

Your online support period will start from the date your PropaGate Learning account is activated and will last:

- 9 months for an individual certificate
- 18 months for the full course

It is possible to extend your online support period for an additional fee:

- 1 month extension £10
- 3 month extension £25
- 6 month extension £50

7. Study options and course costs

This online course allows students a flexible way to study: You can choose to study the full course (all 8 units) or an individual certificate (4 units).

The fee for the full course is £400 (18 months online support) or £250 for an individual certificates (9 months online support). This is payable on application and includes:

- Access to course materials via PropaGate Learning
- Online support for horticultural study questions

It is possible to extend your online support period for an additional fee:

- 1 month extension £10
- 3 month extension £25
- 6 month extension £50

8. Entry requirements

The RHS Level 2 Certificate does not require any existing qualifications or experience. All you need is an interest in the subject and a willingness to set aside several hours a week for study. Overall we are looking for keen, enthusiastic 'plants people' of all ages, who would value the opportunity to study at RBGE and will contribute to the programme.

We do advise that you should have some basic confidence with computers, as the course makes use of PropaGate learning, our online learning environment. You must be self-motivated, have access to an internet-ready computer and e-mail account for the course. There is further information on this later in the handbook.

9. How to apply

Applications for the course will open on Monday 8th February and close on Monday 31st May 2021. We take a break from applications during exam season and will reopen applications later in the summer.

To apply all you have to do is complete the course application form: [Online Application Form](#)

**Please note the electronic form will not be available until 9.00am on Monday 8th February 2021.*

Your application will be processed within 5 working days of receipt. Once your payment has been received your PropaGate Learning account will be activated and course joining instructions will be sent by email. Please only apply when you are ready to start studying.

Please contact by email at rhslevel2@rbge.org.uk if you have any questions.