

## ***On Course for Garden Time***

Garden designer and educator, **Barry Lupton** sheds some light on how to choose a good horticulture course.

Whether you're a school leaver seeking to undertake a degree course, a gardener looking to brush up on your botanical Latin, a self-employed professional seeking qualification or someone who just fancies learning about how plants grow, the range of horticulture courses now on offer means you've no trouble finding one to suit. And what better time to undertake a course? Ireland is truly waking up to the potential benefits that garden activity has to offer and quality courses across the country are inundated with new applicants.

Unfortunately, the sheer volume of educational opportunities on offer has left many people wondering where to start. To help you find the right horticultural path, I've put together a general guide featuring helpful tips, important things to consider and some courses and links to further reading to point you in the right direction.

### ***Getting started...Understanding your motivations***

Before you start filling in forms and investing in ring binders, it's important to clarify your motivation for wanting to learn. While this may sound obvious, a large number of people enrol on courses every year without fully understanding why they're doing it: With the majority suffering some element of frustration and disillusionment with their choice. Understanding motivations to learn can provide you with a firm foundation for gaining knowledge, a focused attitude toward study and a genuine stimulus to engage in course material.

If you are sure what's motivating you, great, write it down and set yourself some objectives, for example, *gain an in-depth knowledge of pruning*. The act of committing answers to paper is a great way to elucidate complex information and will serve as a reminder down the line. If you're not quite sure then maybe it's one of the following...

- *I want to maintain my own garden*
- *I'd like to learn a new skill*
- *I want to change career*
- *I've done an academic course and I'd like to do a practical one*



- *Personal development*
- *I need a course to get a promotion or drive my business forward*
- *I want to progress to 3<sup>rd</sup> level but need to undertake a short course*
- *Stimulate your mind*
- *I'd like to meet people*
- *Gardening looks like a great job*
- *I love plants but I can't seem to make anything grow*

When you've clarified your motivations it should be far easier to select an appropriate course. But even with your motivations clarified, you should still invest time exploring your personal potential and the various options open to you: particularly if you are intending on taking a long course. To understand where your strengths are you might consider....

- *Talking things over with your friends and family to get a range of insights and opinions.*
- *Visiting a guidance councillor or local information centre for advice.*
- *Undertake a psychometric test to find your likes and dislikes. Aptitude tests assess your strengths and weaknesses. Many are now available free online.*
- *Calling into your local education centre to see what services and courses are available that might suit you.*
- *Attending college open days – making a point of asking questions and if possible, talking to existing students.*

### ***Finding the right course for you?***

With the huge range of educational opportunities on offer, it's no wonder applicants get confused. Although not definitive, courses can be generally categorised as follows:

- ***Work-related*** (vocational, focused on career path).
- ***Academic*** (information and research based, qualification and accreditation focused).
- ***Practical*** (hands on, skills focused).

Although there are no hard and fast rules, in my experience, people seeking a career change, who may have been out of education for some time, do well in vocational environments, where there tends to be more direct contact time with teaching staff; School leavers, who have demonstrated keen academic ability and interest in a subject, often do well progressing directly to 3<sup>rd</sup> level

academic study; but can equally do well in vocational study. For those who may have struggled in the school environment – I was one of those – the best option is often a practical course. Practical courses can ease students into the education environment and can provide a genuine stimulus for further study.

For people wishing to up-skill, or change career, by far the best option is to undertake a part time course first. A part time course, while perhaps not giving you everything you need, will provide you with a firm foothold for making a major course choice.

*‘If you are unsure of what type of educational environment you’d prefer, take an online Learning Styles questionnaire and you might be surprised at what you find out. (See web link at the end of the article).’*

### ***The good, the bad and the ugly...telling the difference between good and bad courses***

When you’ve decided what area of study will best satisfy your motivations, you will need to choose between different course options and providers. There are many courses on offer but they are not of equal merit. The best way to assess the quality and value of a particular course is by doing some research. Depending on what you’d like to study you might find that there is a large volume of information to sift through, so keep a record for reference and comparison.

Read prospectuses with care and don’t be swayed by colourful images and marketing language. Take particular note of course accreditation and validation (this might be an awarding or professional body). Course accreditation is an extremely useful tool for establishing the academic level and whether a qualification will be recognised beyond the college gate. Courses that are independently accredited will have undergone a vigorous assessment process and qualifications will often be recognised internationally.

By far the best bit of research you can undertake is to visit potential institutions. Most colleges have open-days that cater specifically for potential applicants and they’re well worth attending. If you are heading to a college open day, you might consider asking some of the following questions...

- *What previous students from the course have gone on to do?*
- *How is the course accredited?*
- *How is the course structured? (Modules/units/terms/semesters)*
- *How are lessons delivered?*

- *How is learning assessed?*
- *What is the workload?*
- *How much does it cost?*
- *What is the timetable?*
- *Are tutors experienced within their industry or sector?*
- *How much access to equipment or facilities you'll have, for how long and how much it will cost?*
- *Are the college facilities appropriate for the course?*
- *What is tutor/student ratio?*

*'One of the best ways of making the right educational choice is to seek practical work experience. There's nothing like hands-on knowledge of a real working environment to focus the mind.'*

***Members only...what do I need to get onto a course?***

Most courses have some level of entry requirement and there is a general, sliding scale from universities, which often require a specific level of academic achievement, to back-to-work programs, which are typically inclusive and seek evidence of interest and aptitude. It must be noted that while some courses have strict requirements for entry, they will typically offer unsuccessful applicants an alternative method of securing a place, i.e. taking a short course before reapplying. And practically all courses offer alternative entry processes for mature students. Private courses, of which there are many in Ireland, do not tend to have any requirements for entry: beyond the ability to pay of course! Try not to be put off by a college door policy. In my time as an educator I've seen students who didn't pass their Junior-Certs, achieve PhD's and others who were about to receive custodial sentences, go on to do Master degrees: there's always a way.

***All in the timing...should I do part time, whole time, evening or mornings?***

Deciding whether to undertake a part/fulltime, evening, weekend or even a morning course comes down to a few simple considerations...

*Firstly, is your area of interest offered in a variety of time options?* Most courses do offer a number of options and with the volume of professionals seeking career changes there will be many more coming on stream over the next year or so. If the timing of a course doesn't suit, ask if there are other options available.

*Secondly, what do you need to get from the course?* (Professional qualification, general knowledge, practical skill and so on). If you're after a professional qualification, it is unlikely that you'll get what you need from an evening course and if all you want to know is how to grow your own, you don't need a master's degree.

*Thirdly, what do you have time for?* Although I've seen students work full time while undertaking serious academic study, the demands of education and work can put a real strain on a person, with negative impacts being felt at all levels. If you're extremely busy, opt for a short course and ease yourself in.

***Making the most of it...maximising your education experience.***

Although I could write a book on how you can maximise your time on a course, there are three fundamental pillars that you should attempt to build your education upon.

***The lecture room*** – always attend every class, sit at the front, ask questions, engage, offer opinion and comment when appropriate, if something isn't completely clear, ask for it to be explained in another way, if you're given notes, make sure you read them thoroughly and keep everything neatly filed.

***Home study*** – don't rely completely upon class material, read around your subjects whenever possible, absorb yourself in your subject, if you're given homework, try to deliver more than is asked of you. The phrase, *you reap what you sow* is particularly apt for horticulture education.

***Application*** – books, lectures and homework can only give you so much, you need to get outside and apply your knowledge in the real world, make mistakes, explore, experiment and reinterpret.

To help you find the right course for you I've compiled a selection of the courses currently on offer in Ireland and included a number of web links for further reading.

Happy learning

Barry Lupton MGLDA  
[www.barrylupton.com](http://www.barrylupton.com)  
[www.scd.ie](http://www.scd.ie)

## Horticulture Course information

<b>Teagasc, College of Amenity Horticulture</b>							
The College of Amenity Horticulture is located at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin 9. It provides students with a unique training opportunity for work in the amenity horticulture industry. We provide our training in association with OPW, the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin Municipal Parks departments and the Golfing Union of Ireland.							
Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	Part/Fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
BSc in Horticulture	Degree Level 7	HETAC	3 years	Full time	Points/mature/links	CAO	DCU
Certificate in Horticulture	Certificate Level 4	FETAC	1 years	Full time	None	Direct	Level 5, degree
Certificate in Horticulture	Certificate Level 5	FETAC	1 year	Full time	None	Direct	Level 6, degree
Advanced Certificate in Horticulture	Advanced Certificate Level 6	FETAC	1 year	Full time	Level 5 in Horticulture	Direct	Degree
Advanced Certificate in Greenkeeping	Advanced Certificate Level 6	FETAC	2 years	Block release (6 weeks/year)	Working in industry	Direct	Advanced Certificate in Golf Course Management
Advanced Certificate in Golf Course Management	Certificate Level 6	FETAC	2 years	Block release (15 days/year)	Working in industry	Direct	
Certificate in Floristry	Certificate Level 5	FETAC	1 year	Part time (2 days/week)	Mature students	Direct	
<b>Contact:</b> College of Amenity Horticulture, National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin 9. Phone 01 8040201, Fax 01 804 0212, Email: <a href="mailto:botanic.college@teagasc.ie">botanic.college@teagasc.ie</a> Web: <a href="http://www.teagasc.ie/botanicgardens">www.teagasc.ie/botanicgardens</a>							

<b>Kildalton College</b>							
Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	P/fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
Certificate in Horticulture	VCH Level 5	FETAC	1 Year	Fulltime	17 years of age	Direct	Advanced Certificate in Horticulture, Bachelor of Science in Horticulture
<b>Contact:</b> Ciaran Walsh, Teagasc, Kildalton College, Piltown, Co Kilkenny. Phone 051 644 400. Fax 051 643 797							

**Senior College Dun Laoghaire**

SCD is a College of Further Education offering an excellent range of professional career courses. Senior College graduates enjoy professional qualifications certified and accredited by nationally and internationally recognised examining and professional bodies.

Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	P/fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
Landscape Design	HND	BTEC	2 years	Full time	Portfolio	Direct	Gloucestershire University Landscape Architecture degree program (final year)
Garden Design	HND	BTEC	2 years	Full time	Portfolio	Direct	Gloucestershire University garden design degree program (final year)

**Contact:**

Senior College Dun Laoghaire, Eblana Avenue Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin,  
CALLSAVE 1800 COLLEGE / 1800 265 5343. Fax 01 280 0386. info@scd.ie www.scd.ie

**Hunting Brook Gardens**

Hunting Brook Gardens is the venue for a programme 30 one day courses in gardening and related subjects.

Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	P/fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
Beginners Guide to Gardening with Jimi Blake						Direct	
Complete beginners guide to Growing Vegetables with Jimi Blake						Direct	
Gardening with Carol Klien						Direct	
One Year Plantspersons course with Jimi Blake						Direct	

**Contact**

Hunting Brook Gardens, Lamb Hill, Blessington, Co. Wicklow Jimi@huntingbrook.com - www.huntingbrook.com Phone 087 2856601 or 01 458 3972  
There are a wide range of other courses available at HuntingBrook, visit their website for further information

**Dundrum College of Further Education**

Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	P/fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
Floristry and Garden Design	FETAC Level 5	FECTAC	2 Years	Mornings only	General Aptitude	Direct	

**Contact:**

Email: [info@cfedundrum.com](mailto:info@cfedundrum.com) or phone (+353) 01 2985412

**The Garden School**

THE GARDEN SCHOOL offer home study courses for RHS Qualifications and also part time courses for RHS Qualifications in Galway. Garden Design and drawing courses are offered as part time courses in Galway.

Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	P/fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
RHS Certificate in Horticulture	RHS LEVEL 2	RHS	2 years	Home Study	None	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
RHS Certificate in Horticulture	RHS LEVEL 2	RHS	12 years	Part time	None	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
RHS Advanced Certificate	RHS LEVEL 3	RHS	2 years	Home Study	RHS Certificate or equivalent	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
RHS Advanced Certificate	RHS LEVEL 3	RHS	2 years	Part time	RHS Certificate or equivalent	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
Designing with Plants	Certificate (RHS level 3 equivalent)	Self	1 year	Part time	None	Direct	Garden Design School Certificate
Designing and Drawing Garden Plans	Certificate (RHS level 3 equivalent)	Self	1 year	Part time	None	Direct	Garden Design School Certificate

**Contact:**

Ciaran Burke, The Garden School, Egool, Kilmovee, Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon.  
Phone 086 385 7540 or 094 964 9943. [ciaran@thegardenschool.ie](mailto:ciaran@thegardenschool.ie) – [www.thegardenschool.ie](http://www.thegardenschool.ie)

**Dublin School of Horticulture,**

The Dublin School of Horticulture offer home study courses for RHS Qualifications and also part time courses for RHS Qualifications in Dun Laoghaire.

Course title	Qualification	Awarding body	Term	P/fulltime	Entry requirements	Method of application	Progression links
RHS Certificate in Horticulture	RHS LEVEL 2	RHS	2 years	Home Study	None	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
RHS Certificate in Horticulture	RHS LEVEL 2	RHS	12 years	Part time	None	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
RHS Advanced Certificate	RHS LEVEL 3	RHS	2 years	Home Study	RHS Certificate or equivalent	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
RHS Advanced Certificate	RHS LEVEL 3	RHS	2 years	Part time	RHS Certificate or equivalent	Direct	RHS Diploma and Master of Horticulture (RHS MHort)
Practical Planting	Certificate (RHS level 3 equivalent)	Self	16-18 weeks	Part time	None	Direct	

**Contact:** Carl Dacus.

28 Spencer Villas, Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin. [www.dsh.ie](http://www.dsh.ie)

<b>Some other useful websites</b>	
Waterford Institute of Technology	<a href="http://www2.wit.ie">www2.wit.ie</a>
Killester College	<a href="http://www.killestercollege.ie">www.killestercollege.ie</a>
Dublin School of Horticulture	<a href="http://www.dsh.ie">www.dsh.ie</a>
The Organic Centre	<a href="http://www.theorganiccentre.ie">www.theorganiccentre.ie</a>
Senior College Dun Laoghaire	<a href="http://www.scd.ie">www.scd.ie</a>
Teagasc	<a href="http://www.teagasc.org">www.teagasc.org</a>
FAS	<a href="http://www.fas.ie">www.fas.ie</a>
Dundrum College	<a href="http://www.dundrumcollege.ie">www.dundrumcollege.ie</a>
Back to education allowance	<a href="http://www.welfare.ie/foi/bte_all.html">www.welfare.ie/foi/bte_all.html</a>
Department of Education	<a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>
College of Further Education	<a href="http://www.csn.ie">www.csn.ie</a>
Night course guide	<a href="http://www.nightcourses.ie">www.nightcourses.ie</a>
FETAC	<a href="http://www.fetac.ie">www.fetac.ie</a>
Edexcel (BTEC)	<a href="http://www.edexcel.org.uk">www.edexcel.org.uk</a>
Career and job advice	<a href="http://www.jobseekersadvice.com">www.jobseekersadvice.com</a>
Learning styles questionnaire	<a href="http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire">http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire</a>
Vocational Education Opportunities	<a href="http://www.vtos.ie">www.vtos.ie</a>
Department of Education	<a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>