

MGiT (Master Gardener in Training) Experiences of the Online Horticulture Program at the University of Guelph

I have completed 5 of the 7 courses required for the Horticulturist Certificate for the University of Guelph and am now taking my 6th course on Ornamental Plant Protection. Two of these are only given in the summer months. The courses last 12-13 weeks and are nominally 35 hours in length but in my case, I have needed at least 15-20 hours /week to do each course properly, so I have never taken more than one per semester. The order in which you take the courses is not terribly important, as they tend to cover discrete topics, but it is worthwhile taking the “Intro to Plant Identification” first, and then “Cultural Practices for Plants” which gives a good overview of topics to be covered in more detail in the other courses. The courses are graded on at least two quizzes (usually about an hour in length), two graded discussions and two assignments, although some courses have more.

There have been about 40 people on the courses I have taken - of all ages, with about 2/3 of these from Ontario, a smaller portion from BC, and the balance from the Prairies, Quebec, the Maritimes and occasionally from the US. About half work in the Horticultural industry and are taking the courses to enhance their knowledge. The others are of all ages and are taking the courses to enhance their gardening skills. For some reason, there are usually only a handful of men on the course.

There are anywhere from 6 to 12 modules for each course, some of which provide a detailed manual, and all courses provide on-line material describing the topics and objectives for each module. Students are strongly encouraged to take part in the discussions, which include optional conferences (e.g. Introduction, Ask the Instructor, and the Coffee Shop for “off-course” topics). These are very good practice for the graded discussions which usually account for 20% of the marks. Students are also encouraged, indeed required, to research course topics on the web to supplement the course material, particularly for the assignments but also to share that knowledge with other students. The quizzes are usually based on course material only.

High-speed access to the web is preferable, although I managed to get by (with difficulty) on my first four courses with a dial up line. In my experience the more you put in the more you get out. These courses have been most useful in my gardening activities and are greatly beneficial in discussing gardening issues with those of my friends who share my interest in gardening. On many instances these have given me the ability to provide them with new information, as well as prompting me to do further research on difficult issues.