Horticultural staff and students at Writtle College are justly proud of their achievement of a prestigious silver gilt medal with their exhibit at this year’s Chelsea Flower Show entitled ‘Turning Red Tomatoes Green’.

Based upon research conducted at the College into the use of processed green waste, it features over 20 different tomato varieties.

It wasn’t just the compost that was recycled, but also the pots, and hanging baskets. The materials used to stage the exhibit were also recycled, having been used at last year’s show. Writtle College Senior Lecturer, Simon Hart, said ‘It was really great to have demonstrated our research

Winner of Young Horticulturist of the Year Competition

On Saturday 6th May 2006 Ben Turner won the final of The Young Horticulturist of the Year Competition, organised by the Institute of Horticulture and held at Royal Botanical Gardens, Edinburgh.

The competition started out with more than 1000 entrants at the beginning of the year from around the UK. Ben won the regional final held here at Writtle in March and proceeded to the final, up against rivals from RHS Wisley, The Botanical Gardens of Glasnevin and a graduate from Edinburgh Botanics among others. These competitions are very stressful and include directed questions, identifications and finger on the buzzer rounds involving all disciplines of horticulture. Ben Turner is completing his BSc (Hons) Horticulture at Writtle this year and has entered into the spirit of competitions in 2005 and 2006.

Ben completed an ND Horticulture at Kingston Maurward College, Dorset undertaking a work placement at The Abbey Gardens in Tresco, Isle of Scilly. He came to Writtle and after Year 1 completed a sandwich year at Sir Harold Hillier Garden and Arboretum. Both of these placements have given Ben a wide range of practical skills which no doubt helped in his success with the competition. Ben has also been involved with the gold medal winning garden at The Chelsea Flower Show.
New modules for 2006 Study

The autumn term will see the start of some new and revamped curriculum areas for the horticulture degree at Writtle College, reflecting the curricular needs in response to feedback from student surveys and industry liaison.

Arboriculture has always been a popular module and from October 2006 it has been widened into two new modules:

Arboriculture 1 - The Living Tree, (a level 2 module), and Arboriculture 2 - Managing Trees (a level 3 module). Plant Growth and Protection has been split for the new look syllabus and will be delivered as Plant Growth and Pathology 1 (level 2) and Plant Growth & Pathology 2.

Ethnobotany, the study of the traditional uses of plants by indigenous people, is also back on the syllabus due to popular demand as is Landscape Ecology.

In addition to these revamped modules, the College will now be offering a new module in Plantsmanship. This is the study of the diversity of plants and their cultivation, and aims to foster the skills of plant recognition, not only by name but also by assessing their cultural requirements based upon their physical form - a highly desirable skill for a horticulturist.

We hope that all of these changes will help to maintain and develop the vibrant and varied curriculum that has become the hallmark of the Writtle College horticulture degree.

Student Placement Opportunities

The industrial placement year remains buoyant with horticulture students engaged in a range of interesting placements.

Two of our BSc students are employed as landscapers in New Zealand.

Trevor Bates will be joining The Longwood Gardens training programme in the USA for 12 months, a very prestigious placement.

Neil Ashworth and Annika Brown are going to Intercrop Ltd for six months to the headquarters in Spain and another placement with an international salad grower involves a secondment at their Spanish headquarters.

Students are currently in the process of finalising placements at Kellie Castle, Dundee, Threave Gardens, Scotland and Downe House, Kent; the home and garden of the great Victorian Naturalist Charles Darwin.

Wendy Crowder has successfully gained her placement with HDRA (Garden Organic) that includes a £3000 bursary from The Hamilton Trust.

Jo Pritchard will be working at The Royal Gardens, Windsor.

An interesting position for one of our undergraduates is that of a trainee botanist for an organic cosmetics company, Liz Earle, based in the Isle of Wight.

Regular contact is maintained with students to ensure the best possible work experience. Feedback obtained from returning students confirms that the sandwich placement forms an important part of the horticultural program.

Students on placements gain practical, management and interpersonal skills with students being enthusiastic and very positive about their experiences.

College Beer Garden: designed & built by HE Landscape students

BSc and First Diploma Landscape students have completed the last phase of implementing the design by Michael Emmerson for the new Beer Garden on the Writtle campus.

Two consecutive teams worked on the client led design to provide a ‘student focused’ outdoor entertainment space complete with an 80m² turf stage and bespoke BBQ and outdoor bar area. The two groups worked closely with the bar manager, Paul Merchant, to ensure it was ready in time for the big summer ‘Survivors BBQ’. Michael’s design included 2 free-standing metal pergola structures at the entrances. These were inspired by the ones used on the Hampton Court ‘Private Entertainer’ garden and have caused great debate!

More hard but rewarding work is lined up for the Landscape module in 06/07.
A number of students studying Turfgrass Agronomy at Writtle College recently gained their National Practical Certificates awarded by the Institute of Groundsmanship. The students were able to complete this nationally recognised certificate as part of their degree programme. Although the degree programme at Writtle College emphasise science, technology and management subject’s, students are still taught and assessed on practical skills in turf and other horticultural maintenance tasks.

This is an important part of Writtle’s courses and ensures that graduates are suitably skilled and have the necessary technical knowledge to fulfil the requirements of employers in the sports turf and amenity horticulture industries. Students at Writtle also benefit from undertaking a full year working in the industry as a ‘sandwich year’ on their course with sports turf and golf club employers throughout the UK, Europe or the USA. This again ensures that they learn and develop strong practical skills for the world of work once they graduate.

Senior lecturer, Stewart Brown, is currently writing his second book provisionally titled ‘Sports Ground Management’ following on from his successful first book which was published last year (Sports Turf and Amenity Grassland Management). The new book will cover all technical, scientific and managerial aspects of managing surfaces used for sport including those for winter games, cricket, tennis, bowls and horseracing as well as topics such as Health and Safety, Event Management and Environmental Issues and intended for both industry technicians and managers, and students studying sports ground management subjects. The book is scheduled for publication in the Autumn of 2006.

Writtle College has recently won the contract for writing the specification for the new race track being constructed at Great Leigh’s in Essex. Great Leigh’s was recognised as Britain’s 60th track by the British Horseracing Board in June 2003. It is the first new-build racecourse to achieve planning permission since regulation was introduced by an Act of Parliament in 1948. It is just 45 miles from Newmarket and following the July 2004 opening of the new A120 Stansted to Braintree by-pass, is less than an hour’s drive by horsebox from racings ‘HQ’.

This exciting new sports facility for the region will centre on two purpose built race tracks with a ‘polytrack’ surface surrounding a natural grass track. Stewart Brown is currently writing the specification for the construction of the grass track. The College will be developing its links with the owners of this new racetrack for the benefit of its students and its tracking and research activities.

The Foundation degree in Floristry, is an ideal qualification for the academically able student wishing to enter this essentially craft-led business.

Three of the students had their corsage work reach the top ten in the Society of Floristry magazine competition in May and their designs appeared in the magazine, much to their delight.

From this first intake, Heidi Baker has achieved remarkable success, gaining a work experience placement at the prestigious West End florists’ Earthworks, which she maintained throughout the College year.

She was a member of the Society of Floristry’s team at Flowers 05, helping to build some huge floral creations to decorate the show venue in London. Her photo can be seen in the autumn edition of the Society’s magazine, Focal Point. Earthworks have asked her back to be part of the team during her second year, along with another Writtle student, Takuya Hirai.

We have great hopes for these high-fliers, with exam success and competition entries on the horizon.
**ERASMUS update**

Through the Erasmus scheme we have developed close links with the University of Almeria in Spain. In recent years a number of student and staff exchanges have occurred between Writtle and Almeria.

Robert Vickery (BSc Horticulture 2) is currently on a 6 month work placement with ‘Intercrop’ and is involved with the production of salad crops for the UK market.

This area of Spain produces enormous amounts of tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers, courgettes, lettuce and melons for the markets of northern Europe.

Crops lecturer, Lin Blunt recently took part in a staff exchange and was able to visit Robert on his placement.

She was amazed by the production levels in this area of Spain, with 2000 lorries a day exporting the produce.

Harvesting baby leaf in Murcia

**Part-time and mature students**

In the last few years we have received an increasing number of enquiries and applications from mature students. Often one of the first questions asked is - ‘I really like the look of the course, but will I be older than all the rest of the students?’

They are reassured to discover that about a third of the students are aged 25+.

Some of these students are changing careers. Others may have worked for a while and have then decided to go to university.

Part-time study is also popular with those who have to continue working - these students usually come to college for 1 or 2 days each week.

You are probably aware that from October 2006 all universities will be increasing their tuition fees. The DFES has recently announced that the fee grant for part-time students will be increasing to £750 per year and that there is also a possible course grant to cover course expenses, of £250 per year. (The figures above are for students taking 50% of a full-time course). Both grants are means tested with provisional household income levels set at £15344 for maximum grants and £23145 as maximum income for receipt of partial fee grant. See www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport, www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance and the college website (below) for more detailed information regarding fees for study at Writtle and grants. The College also has limited funds to help part-time students with their fees. Please contact:

Student Support Unit
Maddison Building
Writtle College
Chelmsford CM1 3RR
Tel: 01245 424200
Email: studentsupport@writtle.ac.uk

If you are thinking of becoming a mature student, whether full-time or part-time, please come to one of our open days or information evenings and discuss the wide range of opportunities open to you at Writtle. Dates of events are listed on the College website.

For further information about specific issues mentioned in this issue, you can contact the following members of staff. Please quote ref.Hortnews 5 when replying:

Course enquiries Full-time and Part-time
- John Cullum  email: fjc@writtle.ac.uk

For news items contact:
- Mick Lavelle  email: ml@writtle.ac.uk

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