

# Gardeners dig into new careers

## School boasts 100% employment rate

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for Metro Toronto

The Niagara Parks School of Horticulture proves the grass is definitely greener on the other side.

Using facilities such as the Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens, Floral Showhouse, and Butterfly Conservatory, the school takes pride in its real-life classrooms where students study 40 hours a week, 48 weeks a year, for three years.

"Our living room is our classroom and we see plants year round," said student Dan Cooper. "Even when going for a walk, we're continually studying."

The institution began as a training school for apprentice gardeners in 1936, during a gardener shortage. Today, the diploma program enrolls approximately 12 students annually and is celebrating its 17th anniversary, said superintendent Liz Klose.

Aside from learning hands-on horticultural and landscaping skills, students are also taught management and communications.

"Our outdoor classroom gives students an extra advantage," Klose said. "Communication, crew management, and practical skills

are employability skills that are taught and reinforced beyond the classroom."

Though the practical component makes up 70 per cent of the curriculum, Klose said even some of the academic classes take place outdoors such as land surveying and plant identification where students learn more than 3,000 plants at the end of seven courses. With 34 courses, the curriculum also includes botany, landscape design, plant pathology (diseases), entomology (insects), and plant propagation.

The students' education includes a third-year internship, lasting for 10 to 12 weeks. In previous years, students studied in locations such as Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. Each year, students also embark on a study tour, which

gives them a broad industry perspective, Klose said.

Now in his second year of the program, Cooper is working towards his Niagara Parks Diploma and Certification of Apprenticeship as a horticulture technician. But when he first began, the decision to study horticulture came easily. "Being conscious of the environment is good knowledge to have," he said.

Currently, the school's job boards are covered with more job postings than students, Cooper said.

With a 100 per cent employment rate, Klose said students are in great demand when they leave

the school, pursuing such careers as estate gardening, education, design/build and business management.

According to Klose, gardening is



NIAGARA PARKS SCHOOL OF HORTICULTURE PHOTOS

Left, Matt Robinson, a second-year student at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture, embraces his passion for horticulture and trees. Melanie Gore, a Niagara Parks School graduate, uses a stone cut saw in the dry stone wall construction project in Landscape Construction class at the Parterre Garden in the Botanical Gardens.

North America's No. 1 leisure activity. "Trained horticulturists and landscapers are business professionals who beautify outdoor spaces and make an aesthetic improvement in our environment," she said. "Even

with a busy lifestyle everyone can have a garden paradise to enjoy and relax in."

For admission requirements and more information, log on to [www.schoolofhorticulture.com](http://www.schoolofhorticulture.com).