

## **What is Social and Therapeutic Horticulture? (STH)**

Horticulture and gardening offer a unique range of activities that can be used to enable people to build the skills and confidence to change their lives.

Participation in an appropriately selected programme of horticulture or gardening can improve or maintain physical, psychological, social, cognitive or vocational abilities.

The history of gardening as a therapy can be traced back many centuries, although it wasn't until the twentieth century that its potential for use in a more structured way was understood and the term 'social and therapeutic horticulture' (STH) was used. STH is therefore often described as a young profession and this is evident when considering the professional training structure.

## **A changing role**

Prior to the development of courses in social and therapeutic horticulture (STH), experience of working in the field coupled with experience or a formal qualification in an allied subject may have been sufficient to secure a job or promotion. However, more and more employers are demanding multi-skilled professionals who have both experience and a formal qualification, ideally in STH. This reflects the increasing need for practitioners who can not only develop relevant programmes for their clients, but also manage staff and volunteers, secure funding, draw up detailed proposals for developing the project and promote their work to other professionals.

Some means of gaining experience in these often diverse fields are short term and relatively low cost, such as attending a short course and undertaking volunteer work at a STH project. Others may involve gaining accredited qualifications meaning more commitment of time and money, and are dependent upon the availability of courses in the area.

There is currently no one route that can be taken to a career in STH and currently no one course that will cover everyone's needs. The diversity of jobs in this sector means that there is a different emphasis on different skills and qualifications for each gardening or horticulture project; therefore there are a number of routes that can be taken to gain the skills required for any given post. Thrive also produce a briefing sheet entitled 'Is a Career in STH for me' (briefing sheet 3b) that may help you to decide if Social and Therapeutic Horticulture is for you.

**Thrive Briefing  
Sheet no:  
1**

## Overseas information

The American  
Horticultural Therapy  
Association  
150 South Warner Road,  
Suite 156  
King of Prussia,  
PA 19406  
USA  
[www.ahta.org](http://www.ahta.org)

Kansas State  
University  
2021 Throckmorton Plant  
Sciences Center  
Manhattan KS 66506-550  
USA  
[www.oznet.ksu.edu/horttherapy/](http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/horttherapy/)

The Canadian  
Horticultural Therapy  
Association  
CHTA Head Office,  
100 Westmount Road,  
Guelph, Ontario N1H 5H8  
Canada  
[www.chta.ca](http://www.chta.ca)

Horticultural Therapy  
Association of Victoria  
Inc.  
412 Whitehorse Road,  
Balwyn, Vic 3103  
or PO Box 369, Balwyn  
North, Vic 3104  
Australia  
[www.horticulturaltherapy.com.au](http://www.horticulturaltherapy.com.au)

## Training and development routes

The following sets of options are appropriate for most people who contact Thrive for advice on careers in STH.

### For people coming into the profession with a horticulture background:

- attend a training day in STH
- attend a training day relating to a specific disability group or disability awareness
- gain experience by working or volunteering at a horticulture project (contact Thrive about projects in your area)
- take a social and therapeutic horticulture course that leads to a formal qualification (there may be exemptions from parts of the course for existing qualifications or experience)
- if you have horticultural experience but no qualification take a horticulture course that leads to a formal qualification (preferably level 2 & above)
- attend a horticulture course that increases existing horticultural skills e.g. a person qualified in nursery production could broaden their area of expertise through a course in amenity horticulture or garden design.

### For people from a social or healthcare background such as occupational therapy or nursing:

- attend a training day in social and therapeutic horticulture
- gain experience by working or volunteering at a horticulture project (contact Thrive about projects in your area)
- take a social and therapeutic horticulture course that leads to a formal qualification (there may be exemptions from parts of the course for existing qualifications or experience)
- take a horticulture course that leads to a formal qualification (preferably level 2 & above)

### For people coming from school or college, or wanting a career change:

- attend a training day in social and therapeutic horticulture, to gain an understanding of the subject and to meet people working in the field
- gain experience by working or volunteering at a horticulture project (contact Thrive about projects in your area)
- take a social and therapeutic horticulture course which leads to a formal qualification
- take a course in horticulture that leads to a formal qualification.
- take a course within health and social care that leads to a formal qualification

## Training courses

It is important to investigate carefully to see whether a course is appropriate to meet your needs. To supplement expertise working at a project, a one-day course may 'fill a gap' with training in a particular area, without the need to undertake a longer course. Study the course prospectus carefully to determine what will be covered and who will be involved (and what expertise they have) in running the course.

Asking about the following will help you get an overall feel for the course:

- How long has the course run?
- Can you speak to someone who has taken the course?
- Who is the validating body or external examiner?
- How often is the course re-validated and updated?
- How many students have progressed through the course?
- Are there opportunities for the student group to meet if it is a distance or flexible learning type course?
- What modifications have been made to the course since it was first introduced?

Thrive have delivered training courses in the field of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture for over 20 years.

## Undergraduate courses

- Thrive currently offers an Award in STH Programme Development. The Award is accessed via attendance of a 2-day course on Thrive's National Short Course Programme. This will also be available as an online course.

## Accredited courses

- Coventry University currently offer a Professional Development Diploma and a MSc in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture. For details call Coventry University on 024 7765 7688.

You could also consider an accredited course such as an Occupational Therapy degree or a qualification in environmental psychology, social or therapeutic studies.

Japan Herb School  
1-13-18 Higashi-Kanda,  
Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo 101,  
Japan  
(runs primary course in  
Therapeutic Horticulture  
developed in conjunction  
with Thrive)

Japan Horticultural  
Therapy Society  
5-12-5-401 Roppongi  
Minato-ku Tokyo, Japan

IGGT  
International Society  
Gardening Therapy  
Giebener Strabe 47  
D-35305 Grunberg  
Germany  
[www.IGGT.eu](http://www.IGGT.eu)

## Information

**Events:** conferences and training events are usually listed in relevant Journals

**Courses:** Thrive training and education programme, listings in *Horticulture Week* and other specialist care magazines; annual Educational Supplements and *Horticulture Week* for mainly horticultural courses or land based colleges and universities;

**Jobs:** may be advertised in Thrive website [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk), *Horticulture Week* [www.hortweek.com](http://www.hortweek.com) and other relevant newspapers and websites

## Thrive training and education

Thrive offers a comprehensive training and education programme that has a range of courses to suit everyone, from career changers who would like to find out more to the most experienced practitioners and everyone in between. Our step by step programme aims to provide an identifiable blended learning pathway of specialist education and teaching in the field of Green Care and Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) for practitioners and professionals.

**Step 1** - Thrive runs a '**Step into STH**' workshop that offers learners the opportunity to gain an insight into STH and its practice, and gain practical skills and advice.

### Step 2

**National Short Course Programme (NSCP)** we offer a set of days looking at the practice of STH and Green Care about related subjects and for specific client groups. These days offer professionals the opportunity to use Thrive training days to support their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). **Online Programmes** we offer an expanding range of online courses in addition to and in support of the NSCP. Some of these are available free of charge <https://thrivelearn.org.uk/>

**Step 3 – Undergraduate course** we also offer the opportunity to study the Award in STH Programme Development, which will also be available in an online form.

All of Thrive's Training and Education programme offers an opportunity to learn more about the practice of STH. The training days are held in four regions; South, Midlands, North and London.

Thrive also offer bespoke training as an opportunity for organisations to access a training event specific to their needs. Please contact Thrive for more information about our bespoke service.

## Continuing professional development

Some professions (occupational therapy, teaching etc) require the qualified individual to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) through conferences, training events and research. As social and therapeutic horticulture is self regulating, it is good practice to continually update skills and knowledge, keep training records to prove consistency and provide evidence to employers and/or funders.

**Thrive, The Geoffrey Udall Centre, Beech Hill, Reading RG7 2AT**  
**T: 0118 988 5688 F: 0118 988 5677 E: [info@thrive.org.uk](mailto:info@thrive.org.uk) W: [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)**

Thrive is registered as the Society for Horticultural Therapy. Charity number 277570. Company number 1415700.