

Success for Teagasc students at European HortiChallenge event

Sarah Simpson
College Technician, Teagasc College of Horticulture in the National Botanic Gardens

Two students from the Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture – Chélirs Brecq from Birr, Co Offaly, and Aoife Hester from Navan – took part in HortiChallenge 2024.

HortiChallenge is a competition which brings together students from across Europe studying within the horticulture sector. This year's competition was held in Estonia.

Chélirs had just completed the Level 6 Landscape Design and Construction course and Aoife had just finished her Level 5 placement with the Office of Public Works in the National Botanic Gardens. The two students were accompanied by myself and Deirdre Walsh, assistant principal.

HortiChallenge competition

The competition was held in Rāpina, an idyllic, rural town on Lake Pihkva in the south of Estonia, surrounded by beautiful birch and pine forests. This landscape is characteristic of Estonia, with 50% of the land area under forestry and 25% used for agriculture.

At the opening ceremony, the principal of the host college, Kalle Toom, gave a very warm welcome to Team Ireland, as it was our first time taking part in the HortiChallenge competition. We had travelled the furthest to compete.

There were 14 teams from 12 countries all keen to show off their horticultural skills. The countries represented were Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway and Romania, with Austria and Estonia entering two teams.

The competition consisted of 20 tasks to test the students on a range of horticultural skills.

These included grafting, sowing seed and pricking out seedlings, taking cuttings, plant identification, seed



(l-r) Sarah Simpson, Deirdre Walsh, Chélirs Brecq and Aoife Hester.

and cone identification, planting to a planting scheme, setting up an irrigation system, donning PPE, and soil pH and fertiliser calculations.

Over two days, the students moved from station to station across the college campus, completing all of the tasks as a team. They were evaluated on the quality and speed of their work, as well as their ability to work together.



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On Saturday evening, the awards ceremony took place in a beautiful wooded area of the college grounds, followed by a celebratory dinner at Sillapää Castle, overlooking the lake. We were absolutely thrilled when Kalle Toom announced Team Ireland

as coming in third place.

Aoife and Chélirs certainly set the standard for new entrants into the competition and wowed the judges with both their performance and character.

The students were delighted with their result and it was wonderful to see their confidence soar.

Dedication

We knew these two students would be great candidates to represent the college and country, as they had shown real dedication to their chosen programmes from the start.

They quickly became very popular among the other teams and were proud to explain some of the uniqueness of Irish culture such as the great game of hurling!

They were not only great ambassadors for Teagasc, but also brilliantly represented Irish horticultural education, and the industry as a whole.

If you would like to know more about Teagasc horticulture courses please consult the College of Horticulture link on www.teagasc.ie.