

# Certifiable!

## Become a Certified Horticulture Professional as Part of Your Professional Brand

*Certification programs can help you grow and advance your career.*

BY CHAD MILLER

**A**rchitects. Bankers. Nurses. Accountants. Engineers. Agronomists. Auto mechanics. What do all of these professions have in common? All of them (along with many other professions) have certification programs that provide professionals in their disciplines opportunities to earn certifications, designating and assuring the public that an individual is qualified to conduct or perform their job. [Architects (e.g., LEED), auto mechanics (e.g., ASE), bankers (e.g., CTFA; CRSP), nurses (e.g., NP, CNS), accountants (e.g., CPA, CMA), engineers (e.g., PE) agronomists (e.g., CCA, CPAg)].

In our daily lives, as consumers and business professionals, we interact with and hire professionals from many different fields. We rely on their expertise and trust their advice and service, both in our professional and personal lives. But how does one know which company or professional is reliable and trustworthy to do the job or service right?

While it may or may not be obligatory for individuals of a specific profession to obtain certifications in order to do business, individuals in many professional fields acquire certification to enhance their ability to gain customer respect and trust, document their expertise, and ultimately attract new clientele. Many professionals even find it valuable to hold multiple certifications.

Did you know that the American Society for Horticultural Sciences (ASHS) offers a national certification program for you and the horticulture industry? This program is designed for anyone involved in the production, sales, marketing and use of horticultural plant material and products including growers, suppliers, greenhouses, nurseries, garden centers, landscapers, vegetable and fruit producers and allied trades.

### WHO IS ASHS?

ASHS is the world's premier professional society for horticultural science, somewhat analogous to the American Society for Civil Engineers or the American Medical Association. Horticulture is the science and art of producing, improving, marketing, and using fruits, vegetables, flowers, and ornamental plants. It differs from botany and other plant sciences in that horticulture incorporates both science and aesthetics. Learn more about ASHS at [www.ashs.org](http://www.ashs.org).

ASHS development of the certified professional horticulture program originated in 1976, at the annual ASHS meeting and was finally implemented at the annual meeting some 15 years later.

### ASHS Certified Horticulturist (CH) Upcoming Test Dates and Locations

#### Fees for examination

ASHS Members – \$160  
Nonmembers – \$235

#### June 14, 2016 (application deadline June 7, 2016)

Hutchinson Island Marriott Beach  
Resort & Marina  
(During FSHS Annual Meeting)  
Hutchinson Island, Florida  
Time to be announced

#### July 12, 2016 (application deadline July 1, 2016)

Greater Columbus  
Convention Center  
(During Cultivate '16)  
Columbus, Ohio  
8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

#### August 11, 2016 (application deadline August 4, 2016)

Sheraton Hotel  
(During ASHS Annual Meeting)  
Atlanta, Georgia  
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**October 15, 2016** (application  
deadline October 7, 2016)  
225 HFSB; Department of  
Horticulture; TAMU 2134  
College Station, Texas  
1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

**October 18, 2016** (application  
deadline October 11, 2016)  
Longwood Gardens  
1011 Longwood Road  
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania  
1 p.m. to 5 p.m.



Initially, the certification program was administered through the Federation of Certifying Boards in Agriculture, Biology, Earth, and Environmental Sciences. In 2000, full control of the certification program was moved under the auspices of ASHS. More recently, several dedicated ASHS members developed the certified horticulturist program, which was implemented in 2008.

### ASHS CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Three national certification programs are offered by ASHS to horticulturists and professionals working in the horticulture industry with a major goal of recognizing competent individuals in their various fields and to increase professional standing and visibility of Horticulture as a profession and career.

The horticulture certification provides employers and consumers alike with the knowledge that the person they are hiring or contracting with is someone who is knowledgeable in

the field and adheres to ethical practices. The three certification programs offered through ASHS are: Certified Professional Horticulturist (CPH), Associate Professional Horticulturist (APH) and Certified Horticulturist (CH).

**Certified Professional Horticulturist.** The CPH program, the highest certification level offered by ASHS, recognizes horticulturists employed in the industry, scientific, education and service sectors, in both the public and private sectors; who have significant work experience, have established themselves in the industry, adhere to ethical practices and have a minimum education of a Bachelor of Science degree in horticulture or a closely related field. As a CPH, one may be solicited to consult or advise horticulture ventures, both public and private, advise elected officials, provide legal testimony, and provide appropriate information to the media. To be a CPH, the applicant must have a bachelor's degree and five years work experience; while individuals with an advanced degree must have at least three years work experience.

The complete application process to become a CPH is available on the ASHS web site. After submitting an application, the National ASHS Certification Board reviews and assesses an applicant's credentials including education or academic qualifications, professional experience, and professional references in order to determine if the applicant meets the qualifications. Currently this certification is based on credentials and no exam is required. All certified individuals must acquire and document continuing education units to retain their certification.

**Associate Professional Horticulturist.** This certification is similar to that of the CPH, however it is for individuals who do not have the minimum amount of practice in the horticulture profession. This includes new graduates with a B.S. in horticulture or closely related field; and those graduates are encouraged to consider APH certification. After the individual meets the minimum amount of experience, they would then be

eligible to apply for CPH certification. The complete application process to become an APH can be found on the ASHS web site.

**Certified Horticulturist.** Certified horticulturists are individuals actively employed or in support

of the horticulture industries and other specialty crop areas including green industry, landscaping, floriculture, greenhouses, nurseries, garden centers, fruits, vegetables, public gardens and turf. These practitioners may be employed in

the production, maintenance, sales, marketing, research, education, servicing and/or support of the horticulture and green industries including greenhouse and nursery operations, garden centers and landscape companies. This is a



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national credential that validates the knowledge and skill set of horticulturists in the industry. Like the other program certifications, the CH designation provides assurance to employers, governmental officials and agencies, and members of the industry, that the certified individual has the required knowledge, skills, and experiences to competently perform duties in the horticulture industry and adheres to ethical practices. There are numerous companies and organizations that seek to employ CHs. These include greenhouses, nurseries, plant propagators — both seed and small plant producers, landscaping companies, consulting firms, Cooperative Extension, floral shops, public and botanical gardens, golf courses and sports turf facilities, horticultural suppliers, and many more.

To become a CH, the candidate must have horticulture experience. This would include at least three years of paid, full-time horticulture experience without a horticulture degree; or a two-year horticulture degree with two years paid horticulture experience; or a four-year horticulture degree with one year of paid practical experience. In addition, the candidate must pay for and pass the certification exam with a score of 71 percent or higher. All certified individuals must acquire and document continuing education units in order to retain their certification. There are several opportunities throughout the year and locations around the United States in which

the CH examinations are administered (see sidebar). Check the ASHS website for additional information. The direct link for the CH program is [www.ashs.org/default.asp?page=CH](http://www.ashs.org/default.asp?page=CH).

### PURPOSE

One might ask “*Why* should I consider becoming certified? What are the benefits — what’s in it for me?” There are several benefits to becoming certified. First, certification programs were developed and established as a means to provide a process for industry professionals to verify their level of industry based expertise, based on uniform national industry standards and procedures.

Second, certifications have the opportunity to promote best practices while advancing the horticulture industry. In a time when it seems other industries and non-horticulture professionals are defining various aspects of our industry, becoming certified is an excellent opportunity to show the public the great skills, qualifications, and credentials so many of our industry members possess. And with the increased individuals with certification, there is potential to bring more of our industry

professionals into these discussions.

Third, certification elevates the perceived level of professionalism within the field. When the public, government, and/or business need to consult with someone in our field, the pool of certified professionals provides a place for them to look for documented expertise. Hiring certified professionals provides opportunities for them to make well-informed decisions based on the competence represented by the certification designation. They can be more confident and trusting of the work by our industry. As briefly mentioned above, certifications in other professions and industries have long been a standard. The more certified members we have, the more noticeable and important it will be to have certification. The numbers are growing and you can make a difference in elevating the professionalism within our industry by participating.

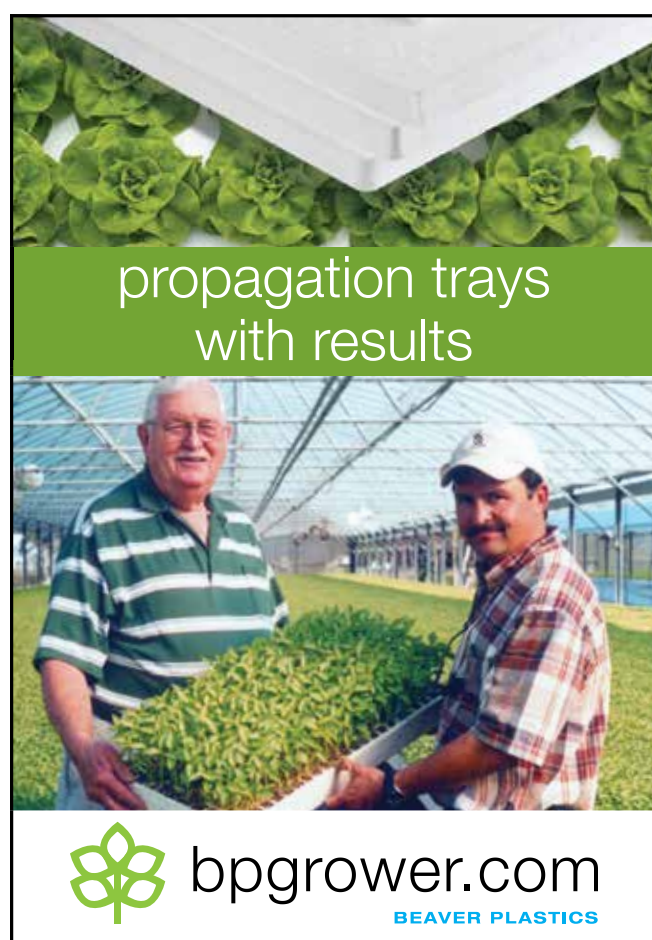
Fourth, becoming certified is a great opportunity for individuals to increase and validate their professional standing as a practicing horticulturist and to distinguish themselves from others in the profession, through substantiating evidence of an individual’s qualifications.

Fifth, through the certification process and maintaining that certification, there are incentives for the horticulturist to continue their professional development, which can lead to becoming a leader in the industry. The required continuing education requirements enhance the currency of the individual’s knowledge and expertise. Certification will not only enhance one’s personal professional image, but it will also enhance our discipline and industry as a whole. Now is the time to add to *your* professional brand image.


### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

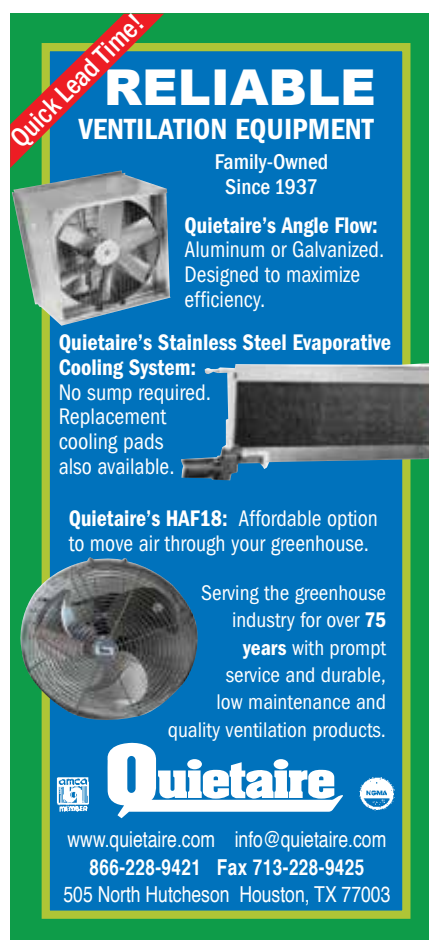
For further information about any of these programs, contact Cindy Slone, manager of marketing and member services at the American Society for Horticultural Science, 1018 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314. Phone: 703.836.4606 ext. 116; Email: [cslone@ashs.org](mailto:cslone@ashs.org) or visit [www.ashs.org](http://www.ashs.org) for more information and downloadable application materials. *gpn*

*Chad Miller, CPH, is an assistant professor of ornamental horticulture at Kansas State University and a member of the ASHS National Certification Board. He can be reached at [ctmiller@ksu.edu](mailto:ctmiller@ksu.edu).*



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