



Royal
Botanic Garden
Edinburgh

RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration Distance Course 2023-25



Thank you for requesting further information on the RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration Online Course. We are delighted that you are considering joining this course, which we offer in a format designed to fit in with your life wherever you are located.

Through PropaGate, our virtual learning environment, you will be able to work remotely throughout the course. Online tutorials via Microsoft Teams will be scheduled at intervals to support work in progress.

This is a fantastic place to study – a world-renowned centre for horticultural and botanical training and research. Most important for our students is the expertise of our horticultural and botanical staff who are integral to the development of our online courses. The Diploma in Botanical Illustration offers students the benefit of this expertise, as well as tuition from world renowned specialists in botanical painting and drawing.

This handbook introduces you to the RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration Online Course (there is also an attended version of this course which takes place over two years and is delivered here in Edinburgh). I hope this handbook answers all your questions, but please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any further queries. We look forward to receiving your application!



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1. Introduction to the Course

“That certain green, the way it catches the light, gives away its identity, like recognising the walk of a friend before you can see their face.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Gathering Moss

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Diploma in Botanical Illustration, is designed to help students learn to explore the particular characteristics that make each plant special and each species unique, using a set of specialist drawing and painting skills and techniques to document their observations as botanical artworks.

The Distance Learning Course takes place over three years and follows a set timetable. Through PropaGate, the RBGE’s virtual learning environment you will work through the same learning modules as the long running attended course. Online tutorials are scheduled at intervals throughout the course to support work in progress, and these will typically make use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Skype.

This course requires a significant amount of home study - approx. 20 hours per week. All course content is delivered via PropaGate with online tutor support and feedback. The first 7 modules (18 months) will cover essential techniques and skills of botanical illustration, leading to the production of a themed collection of paintings to be completed in the final module (12 months).

The course tutors are botanical artists Jacqui Pestell, Isık Güner, Sarah Roberts, Sharon Tingey and Claire Banks, and Marianne Hazlewood. There will also be input from RBGEs botanists and horticulturists, for specific modules.

The Diploma is awarded to students who successfully complete all modules of study and produce a themed and agreed collection of artwork to an approved standard. The Diploma is awarded by RBGE and externally moderated by acknowledged experts.

2. Entry Requirements

Although there is no formal level of qualification necessary for entry to this course, there is a need to demonstrate a high level of motivation, together with evidence of personal commitment to botanical illustration. It is expected that all artists who join this course will embark on a steep learning curve*.

Students aiming to enter the Diploma course will also be required to demonstrate a pre-existing level of skill in drawing and painting, ideally botanical or plant in subject. There is considerable competition for places and initial selection will be through portfolio assessment (8 - 10 pieces) and your application form. Your application should be submitted online and should demonstrate your skill, interest and enthusiasm for the subject. We may request that you attend an online interview.

There is a lot of reading, and you must be able to write in English when communicating with your tutor. A good understanding of the English language is required to get the most from the course and to enable you to succeed in your studies.

You should be a competent computer user with a basic understanding of standard computer applications such as using an internet browser, email and word processing. Your course involves uploading your drawings and paintings, so experience of scanning images using a scanner, taking photographs with a digital camera and of editing/re-sizing images would be useful.

*Please note that this course is not designed for beginners. Artists at beginner's level would gain most benefit from the RBGE Certificate in Botanical Illustration course. The certificate course has been created as an ideal stepping-stone to the Diploma and offers an introduction to the basics skills of drawing and painting needed to record plants and produce a portfolio of work. Full details can be found here: www.rbge.org.uk/certbi

3. Course Structure and Dates

3.1 Course Structure

The RBGE Distance Learning programme is facilitated through PropaGate Learning - RBGE's virtual learning environment

<https://propagatelearning.rbge.ac.uk>

Modules, lessons and assignments are delivered through PropaGate Learning. This will also be the main method for RBGE tutors to engage with the students and provide feedback on your activities and assignments, as well as answering any questions you may have.

Interactive methods used on the site will include picture galleries, forums and access to demonstration videos. There will be step-by-step footage as well as links to a bank of further botanical demonstrations and places of associated interest. PropaGate Learning also offers student discussion forums so you are able to communicate and support each other which has proven a wonderful resource for our student groups.

Throughout your studies with us, you will also be tutored by the Course Director. You will also be allocated different specialist tutors throughout the course depending on which module you are studying. They will conduct the assessments, provide feedback and online support which will include video tutorials via Microsoft Teams to monitor your progress and development.

3.2 Course Dates

The course begins on Thursday 2nd March 2023 and will follow a set timetable, meaning each module needs to be completed by a certain date. The notes and activities for each module will be made available following this time frame. Students need to pass each module to progress and to achieve the Diploma.

Part 1: 2nd March 2023 – 12th July 2024

The first year of the course will introduce each of the following:

- Module 1: Drawing Fundamentals
- Module 2: Painting Fundamentals
- Module 3: Painting the Details
- Module 4: Scientific illustration
- Module 5: Complex Compositions
- Module 6: Botany Part 1
- Module 7: Native Tree Project

Part 2: 1st August 2024 – 28th August 2025

In this part students will be working independently with online support.

- Module 8: Themed Collection of Paintings

4. Online Learning

PropaGate Learning is an online learning environment that you log into in order to access your course. This is a place for learning and for discussing topics and progress with your tutors and other students. PropaGate Learning allows you to study from home, whilst becoming part of a thriving and enthusiastic learning community.

Your course consists of a number of elements including: slideshows / presentations, notes, videos, galleries, forums, online meetings and an upload area for your assignments and portfolios called MyPortfolio.

4.1 How can I prepare for studying online?

Experience of using your computer, using websites, using email and participating in online forums will stand you in good stead for learning online. Your course involves uploading your drawings and paintings to an online portfolio area, so experience of scanning images using a scanner, taking photographs with a digital camera and of editing/re-sizing images is most important, as we will need to see really good images of your work. A level of intermediate familiarity of these technical skills is essential.

It is expected that you take time to familiarise yourself with the online environments. Prior to the course starting, you will be given access to PropaGate Learning and MyPortfolio to find your way around. This will enable you to fully engage with the course itself once it starts, rather than spending your time learning the software.

4.2 What hardware or software will I need?

You will need access to a desktop or laptop computer with a reliable internet connection. Most of the course will be accessible via a tablet, but we recommend using a laptop or desktop computer. You may find some aspects of the course will be easier to use on a computer.

You will need to make good digital copies of your artwork. So, you will need access to a scanner (we recommend an A3 flatbed scanner) or a digital camera or high quality phone, or access to a copy shop.

Regarding software, you will need an up-to-date browser (e.g. Firefox, Chrome, Safari). You will also need software that will open PDFs (e.g. Adobe Reader), as well as an image-editing programme and Microsoft Teams.

PropaGate Learning is available 24/7 with the exception of any maintenance work, which we will inform you about in plenty of time.

4.3 What support is available?

We encourage everyone to make the most of the discussion forums on the course. These provide a way for students to talk to one another and to tutors and ask each other questions. Tutors usually check the forums at regular intervals (e.g. once or twice a week). There is also a private messaging activity within MyPortfolio where you can contact your tutor directly.

If you ever feel you are stuck with a course-related technical problem, and have already tried working through the help and guidance provided online, you can contact the PropaGate team at: propagate@rbge.org.uk

You can access more information about online learning, and the skills and technology you will need to get the most out of your studies at RBGE, on our [Help & Support](#) pages, you can view these by entering as a guest if you do not already have a propagate account.

5. Course Aims, Content and Modules

5.1 Course Aims

- To develop observational skills through the direct visual examination and informed study of botanical subjects. This is in order to render accurate and informative imagery of the specimens, using watercolour, pen and ink and other graphic methods.
- To develop an understanding of botany and plant structure (form, function and ecology of plants).
- To develop an appreciation of and a familiarity with the living, preserved and library collections at RBGE and other Botanic gardens. To get to know some of the key areas of botanical research and conservation and the role that botanical illustration can play in this.
- To develop and enhance the students' drawing and painting skills, together with proficiency in botanical illustration, for artistic, illustrative and scientific purposes.
- To develop in students an understanding of the process of thorough botanical research and an awareness of the historical context of botanical illustration.

5.2 Course Content

- Students will be trained in visual analysis, where emphasis will be placed on the development of skills through a series of tight and precise exercises.
- Botanical painting will also be studied within its historical context.
- The course will cover fundamentals of botany, the essentials of different plant structures, and the ability to produce and assess botanically accurate drawing and painting work.
- The broader aspects of biodiversity and ecology will be covered in so far as they impact upon botanical illustration.
- The 'Native Tree Project', running through the first and second years provides an opportunity for individual research, draws together all the skills you learn in parallel to focus them on all aspects of a single subject, and gives an insight into the practical potential of botanical illustration.

5.3 Module Outlines

The course is divided into the following eight modules, including practical and theoretical topics, and credit for each is as indicated (total 200 credits):

- 1 Drawing Fundamentals: leading to complex skills (10 credits)
- 2 Painting Fundamentals: mixing and application (10 credits)
- 3 Painting the Details (10 credits)
- 4 Scientific Illustration (15 credits)
- 5 Complex Composition (10 credits)
- 6 Botany: Plant Form and Function (5 credits)
- 7 Native Tree Project (40 credits)
- 8 Third Year Major Project (100 credits)

For each module, you will be assessed according to specific criteria.

Module 1 - Drawing Fundamentals (10 Credits)

Description

This is your first drawing module in the first year. This first stage will cover the fundamentals of drawing accurately and will use living plants as subject matter. It is essential that the drawing of the plant is undertaken in an almost objective, analytical way; the emphasis must always be on observation. By observing the characteristics of a plant and having the tools, techniques and skills to record these, the resulting drawing will represent that particular plant and its species.

Learning Areas

- Botanical accuracy- a demonstration of keen observational skills.
- Draftsmanship – demonstrating proficiency in the application of techniques in both pencil and other media.
- Aesthetics – demonstrating artistic sensitivity, effective composition and control of expression.

Assessment

You will prepare a collection/portfolio of preparatory work and finished pieces that will be assessed on technical competence and whether you have managed to bring your project to a successful conclusion.

Module 2 - Painting Fundamentals (10 Credits)

Description

This is your first painting module in the first year. This first stage will cover the fundamentals of painting, the materials and equipment needed to carry out painting exercises, leading eventually to finished artworks. Students will develop paint application skills from colour mixing through to rendering accurate colour descriptions of outer and inner fruits and seeds; the representation of convincing three-dimensional subjects will be explored. There will be an emphasis on observation, alongside growing confidence in achieving naturally painted subject matter.

Learning Areas

- Colour theory and a knowledge of the paint box -a demonstration of manipulation of colour including shadows.
- Colour mixing and application – demonstrating proficiency in the application of a variety of techniques using paint.
- Aesthetics – demonstrating artistic sensitivity, and convincing rendering of a subject.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of experimental work and finished paintings.

Module 3 - Painting the Details (10 Credits)

Description

This is your first opportunity to produce a whole painting. We will cover composition and how to place the specimen on the page, and address aspects common to all orchids or comparable plants – spotted leaves and flowers, fine hairs and possibly roots. You will use the techniques you have studied so far to create a plant portrait. The project includes accurate colour reproduction of flowers, buds and leaves and the production of a convincing painting which reads as three-dimensional.

Learning Areas

- Application of colour theory studied in Painting Fundamentals 1 and manipulation of colour including shadows.
- Colour mixing and application – demonstrating proficiency in the application of a variety of techniques using paint to accurately represent the plant.
- Aesthetics – composition demonstrating artistic sensitivity, and convincing rendering of subject.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of preparatory drawings and paintings and a final composition which you will complete over the sessions.

Module 4 – Scientific illustration (15 Credits)

Description

Scientific illustration is the technical drawing of botanical art. Its primary aim is to clearly present the botanically important characters of plants for the purpose of their identification. This is often a secondary concern in other forms of botanical art.

In this respect, details as fine as the overall appearance and patterning of hairs can be crucial to the success or otherwise of the image. An elegant mix of clear line drawing, and intricate complexity of shading, hatching and stippling to capture the form of 3-D, real-life structures. The challenge is heightened by the fact that many measured drawings try to resurrect the plant to its living state from a flat, dried herbarium specimen. Accuracy of scale is essential throughout this procedure, and you will also develop skills in plant dissection.

You will be given tuition in the techniques required for accurate, measured drawing from online herbarium specimens, and fresh material if available, including dissections of living flowers.

Learning Areas

- Botanical accuracy- a demonstration of keen observational skills with dried material.
- Draftsmanship – demonstrating proficiency in the application of pen and ink to the plate.
- Gaining knowledge and understand from the botanist.
- Aesthetics – demonstrating artistic sensitivity in the habit drawings, effective composition and control of expression.

Assessment

You will be assessed on proficiency with pen and ink to correctly illustrate a completed composition of the given genus.

Module 5 - Complex Composition (10 Credits)

Description

This is an opportunity to produce a complete study, a complex composition, involving a collection of different seasonal flowering plants. This is to be a fully painted piece with a series of layered plant material juxtaposed against each other, to create an interesting arrangement. Extensive supporting material should accompany the final piece, in the form of sketches and preparatory work leading up to final piece.

- Minimum of 3 subjects
- Compose in a balanced, agreeable way
- Paint rendering three dimensions and a convincing depth of field

Learning Areas

- To capture the character of a group of plants within one composition.
- Application of skills learnt in both previous painting modules and to be expanded upon.
- Colour balance, mixing and application between the different chosen plants.
- Aesthetics - Composition demonstrating artistic sensitivity towards a group piece.

Assessment

You will be assessed through a collection/portfolio of preparatory work and finished complex composition.

Module 6 - Botany: Plant Form and Function (5 Credits)

Description

This module looks at some of the huge range of ways in which plants have adapted to cope with the habitats in which they live. We will look at the development of fruits, seeds, leaves and stems and the ways in which these special structures contribute to the sheer diversity of in the Plant Kingdom. We will also look in more detail at flowers and how four simple whorls of organs can be modified in innumerable ways to ensure the continuation of species. Sessions on the cryptogams (non-flowering plants) allow an insight into the world of these exquisitely structural plants.

Learning Areas

- Understanding plant nomenclature and structure.
- Field observations and speed sketching.

Assessment

The assessment for this module involves trying to capture the botanical detail of the plants, focusing on morphology – the form rather than the subtleties of shade of an individual plant. Your anatomical sketches will be accompanied by scales and full labels.

Module 7 – Native Tree Portfolio Project – Part 1 & 2 (40 Credits)

Description

At the beginning of the course a presentation will be delivered to you on native plants, introducing the Native Tree Portfolio Project. This will be an in-depth project spanning the duration of two years, covering all aspects of botanical research, descriptions and plant development. Critiques of on-going work are scheduled throughout and the project is submitted at the end of year two.

Learning Areas

- Composition – an ability to produce a final composite piece that is both aesthetically pleasing and comprehensive in what it shows.
- Techniques and skills – an ability to use the appropriate medium sensitively in order to describe the form, texture, and colour of the subject.
- Botany – develop a keen awareness of the fine detail, and wider context of the plant's ecology and also its place in botanical art. This draws on wider research.
- Climate Change – gain an understanding of issues and effects on the species.
- To learn the importance of mapping and recording your plant.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on the submission of their final painting as well as the portfolio collection.

Module 8 - Year Three Major Project (100 Credits)

Description

The third year of the diploma is a period of self-study and development and honing of skills learnt in years 1 and 2, augmented with online support and tutorial assistance. The aim is to produce five finished pieces held together under a common theme, with a supporting portfolio of work (sized between A3 and A1).

Throughout the first two years you should be considering the plants around you that you encounter around you —plants which have an importance for conservation or sustainability in the changing climate. Or plants in your local gardens, in the field, or at home—with a view to deciding on a subject or subjects for the final year's study.

Assessment

Weighting is 70% finished artwork portfolio, and 30% research and supporting material for each work. The finished project must be handed in / posted to RBGE for final marking /verification.

**Students who pass the course will be offered the opportunity exhibit their work as part of the RBGE Diploma Show Online Exhibition.*

6. Student Assessment

Modules will be assessed through activities, written research and final pieces of work.

For each module students are required to produce supporting preparatory work in their portfolio illustrating their investigative research and their developing themes. A clear demonstration of the progression from preliminary studies to the final piece of work will be vital. Satisfactory submission of each module is assessed by the course organisers.

For the award of the RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration (Dip BI) all relevant modules must be passed, followed by submission of the third year's independent study.

Each module is graded as follows:

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------|---------------|--------|
| • Referral* | 0-49% | • Merit | 60-69% |
| • Pass | 50-59% | • Distinction | 70% + |

A pass in modules 1-7 is required to progress to the final module. The weighting of the final marks are as follows:

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|------------|-----|
| • Modules 1 - 7 | 50% | • Module 8 | 50% |
|-----------------|-----|------------|-----|

If there is a valid reason for missing a submission (due to ill health etc.), supporting evidence is required and a revised submission date will be set in agreement with your tutor. You must obtain written confirmation of any extension (e.g. through an e-mail.)

- You will only receive a “pass” for any work submitted late without a prearranged extension.
- If the assessment work was submitted and returned to students marked as “Referred” it can be resubmitted but students can only receive a “pass”.
- Please note that these bandings may be moderated before final awards are made.

7. Graduate Paths

Our Diploma in Botanical illustration graduates have pursued a wide range of exciting, and highly individual, career paths using their botanical illustration skills.

Graduates have taken part in exhibitions ranging from small shows engaging local communities, exhibiting with a prestigious Fine Art Galleries, to major international exhibitions celebrating the diversity and beauty of plants around the world.

Some graduate artists are working on making exquisite paintings for Florilegia, others are involved in creating scientific illustrations to document species in different regions for Floras around the world.

The illustrations of RBGE alumni can be seen in many publications, journal articles, books, prints, and educational materials. Teaching and tutoring are a popular route for graduates to share their love of plants and painting, and some have gone on to do advanced study into some of the fascinating aspects of the Diploma subject matter such as Botany and further Art studies.

Some graduates have established successful contemporary practices involving collaborations, residencies, public engagement with plant specialist work, engaging with urban regeneration and 'green space' projects, facilitating community groups and projects. Many are active in organising botanical illustration groups and societies. Others enjoy commercial art practices, producing their own illustrations for a variety of clients.

Our alumni have been strongly represented in international competitions and includes many RHS Gold Medal winners. The work of some graduates is in high demand by collectors. We are proud that the work of all graduates is helping in various ways to do the tremendously important work of engaging people with plants.

The RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration is recognised around the world as a rigorous and exceptional qualification. We hope that its challenges and delights will lead you on a most rewarding, fulfilling (and quite possibly life-changing!) path of self-discovery and an ever-deeper love of plants!

RBGE Diploma in Botanical Illustration 2022 Graduate Show

This online exhibition shows paintings from the final year of the Diploma course, where fifteen artists explore their chosen plant themes - reflecting the rich diversity of subjects both locally in the UK and from around the world. The show celebrates the different approaches and varied techniques in drawing and painting explored throughout the course. Congratulations to all our Graduates.

View the exhibition on our website: www.rbge.org.uk/graduateshow2022

8. Course Fees and Additional Costs

The fee for the Diploma in Botanical Illustration Distance learning course is £4,500. Course fees must be paid in full prior to the start of the course.

This fee will include the following:

- All modules online with video demonstrations and techniques for duration of enrolment
- All online assessment and communication with tutors for duration of enrolment
- Online private tutorials

If you are unable to complete a module in the specified timeframe, there will be an additional charge for marking and feedback. This fee will vary depending on the module and the level of marking and feedback required.

Additional costs to be borne by students:

- All art materials and specialist equipment (e.g. Rotring pens/ fibre tipped pens, coloured pencils and measuring tools etc.) *Please note: On acceptance of a place a detailed list of appropriate materials and specialist equipment will be provided.*
- The following IT requirements for the course:
 - A computer with reliable online access and ability to video call
 - A digital camera or high quality mobile phone camera
 - Access to a scanner (A3 size flatbed scanner is ideal - many photographic shops provide this as a service)
 - An image manipulation package e.g. Adobe Photoshop elements

9. Application Procedure

9.1 How to apply

To apply for the course, you must complete our [online application form](#) and submit a supporting portfolio.

Applications for this course will open at 9:00am on Monday 5th December 2022 and will close at 5:00pm on Friday 6th January 2023. These times are UK times, please take this into account if applying from outside the UK.

Spaces on this course are limited. Selected students may be invited to join for an interview. Successful candidates will be selected based on the quality of the portfolio of work provided. Should we receive a large number of applications that are of a high standard, spaces will be allocated to people based on the date the applications were received.

Successful applicants will be notified within 2-weeks of the closing date.

9.2 What to include in your portfolio

You are required to demonstrate a pre-existing level of skill in drawing and painting, ideally botanical or plant in subject. There is considerable competition for places and initial selection will be through portfolio assessment (8-10 pieces) and your application form. The portfolio work should be close observational work in pencil as well as watercolour.

- Please supply 8-10 examples of your work
- The name of each file and creation date should be in the title of the file
- Provide us with a link to your work

Publishing and sharing your portfolio

Please publish your portfolio to your own website or to a blog or photo sharing site such as Google Photos, Flickr, iCloud, OneDrive, Wordpress etc. Check you can access it using popular browsers such as Safari, Chrome or Firefox, without using a password.

Please do not:

- share your portfolio through Facebook
- share it as an attachment, via a file sharing website or any way that means viewers have to download files or plug-ins

Obtain some advice about sharing files if you're not sure. We have outlined how to use Google Photos below, however we are happy for you to make your portfolio available to use via your website or any other photo sharing service, provided we can view your portfolio easily.

Using Google Photos to send us a link to your portfolio

(from support.google.com/photos)

1. On your computer, open photos.google.com
2. Sign in to your Google Account
3. Upload up to 10 images of your selected artwork that you wish to include with your Application
4. In the menu at the left, click **Photos**.
5. On each photo or video that you want to share, click Select ✓
6. At the top, click + and select Album > NewAlbum
7. Enter an album title and click ✓ at top left. Title your album: [your name]
RBGE application portfolio Dip BI
8. When your album is complete, click Share <.
9. Select **Create Link**
10. Copy link and add to your application form

10. Terms and Conditions

- RBGE reserves the right to cancel this course.
- RBGE cannot be liable for additional costs incurred by student (travel, accommodation etc.) in the event of cancellation.
- If the course does not go ahead any money paid to the RBGE would be refunded in full.
- In exceptional circumstances and by formal application students may apply for a learning extension in order to complete the course. Additional fees would be applicable.

RBGE Diplomas and Certificates

Online Courses: You are eligible for a full refund within 14 days of payment, minus the value of the course available and accessed (e.g. if the course has 10 units and you have accessed one, you will receive 90% of the course fee as a refund).

Attended Courses: We will be unable to offer a refund after the start of the course.

Exercising your right to cancel

If you wish to exercise your right to cancel within the 14 days, you must inform us of your decision within the cooling off period. Cancellation by email or by post is effective from the date on which you send us your message.

Fees will not be refundable should you not complete or pass the course.

Privacy Notice

RBGE will process your personal data for the administration of your course, to create your account on PropaGate Learning and to take payment (where relevant). RBGE will also process your personal data to inform you of any updates to the course, the admissions procedure, course dates, as well as any special offers. For more information see our [privacy notice](#).