



VERMONT CERTIFIED  
HORTICULTURIST

# THE VNLA VCH EXAM STUDY / PREP TIPS



# About the VCH Program & How to Become Certified



The Vermont Certified Horticulturist Program is a certification program designed to provide professionalism in our industry, to increase the professional's education, and to inform the public of the value of using a certified horticulturist. Vermont Certified Horticulturists offer expert advice and professional answers on gardening, landscaping and other horticultural activities. Vermont Certified Horticulturists are located in all areas of Vermont. Most are affiliated with garden centers and landscaping firms.

To get certified, Vermont Certified Horticulturists are required to meet certain criteria (see below), abide by a Code of Ethics, and pass a rigorous written and plant identification exam. Once certified, continuing education keeps certified individuals at the forefront of the industry. The VNLA has reciprocity with other New England states, which means this certification is transferable to other New England state associations with similar programs.

## Eligibility Requirements:

- Pass the VCH Exam.
- Two (2) letters of recommendation from VNLA members.
- Six (6) years of \*full-time nursery, greenhouse, garden center, landscape or related employment **or** three (3) years of \*full-time employment and two (2) years minimum of post-secondary related school education, **or** one (1) year of \*full-time nursery employment and a bachelor's degree in a horticulture related field.

*\*Full-time is defined as a full growing season, spring to fall.*



## VCH Study Manual & Exam

The study manual is 211 pages and is available to order from the VNLA. The manual was last published in 2014 and is currently in the process of being updated. On that note, significant changes have occurred in pesticide regulations since 2014, and we strongly encourage you to learn about the current laws/guidelines in place (<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/public-health-agricultural-resource-management-division/pesticide-programs>).

The VCH exam is a 2-part exam. The written portion is 150 questions which are fill in the blank, multiple choice or true / false. You must score 70% or better (105/150).

The identification portion of the exam is a selection of 50 slides to identify. You must score 70% or better (35/50).

If you pass one section of the exam and not the other, you only have to retake the section you did not pass.

The exam is given in-person twice a year at the VNLA Winter and Summer meetings. We can also schedule an exam for in-person or virtually anytime of the year.

# Written Exam Tips

- ❖ As stated, there are 150 questions on the written portion of the exam. This is actually great news! Each individual question is worth less than one point.
- ❖ Don't get hung up, circle back if you need to, **try to leave nothing blank.**
- ❖ Pay attention in the manual to bold text, overall summaries, and definitions of terms. *Use flashcards for these if you find them helpful!*
- ❖ Don't underestimate the importance of study materials. The time that it takes to put them together is time well spent. If you pass the exam, great! If you need to retake it, your materials will come in handy again.
- ❖ Numbers: we won't ask you to memorize the phone of the poison control center, but we might ask for ph.
- ❖ Focus on key principles.



## Written Exam Tips

The following example questions and answers **are from the actual exam**. We will use them to show you the types of questions generated from the materials in the manual. Please note there are also sample study questions in the manual on pages 210—212.

**Question:**

Rototillers and rotary mowers are commonly used in our industry. Which of the following safety precautions and procedures are correct?

- a. wear heavy, protective footwear
- b. be alert with mowers for hidden objects in tall grass
- c. disengage blades before dismounting from a riding mower
- d. all are correct
- e. none are correct

## Written Exam Tips

**Answer:** d!

This question is an example of how a whole section of a chapter may be summed up by one question. In this case, "Safety On The Job." Don't make the mistake of not reading through the entire list of options first. Know that we aren't trying to trip you up or trick you. Common sense can go a long way! If there's a multiple choice, don't leave it blank, do yourself a favor and pick your best bet or as they say, go with your gut.

**Question:**

Removing bark or otherwise damaging it as by a wire or trimmer, around most or all the circumference of a trunk is called \_\_\_\_\_.

## Written Exam Tips

**Answer:** Girdling!

This question is a good example of how a good knowledge or the use of flash cards of the glossary terms will make certain you know the answer. But as always, if you're unsure, go with your best guess! **Remember:** There are no negative points. Basic terms are on pages 41-64, and pest control terms can be found on pages 181-183.

**Question:**

Signal words on labels describe the long-term dangers of a concentrated pesticide product.

True False

## Written Exam Tips

**Answer:** False

Page 184, "Signal words are found on pesticide product labels, and they describe the acute (short-term) toxicity of the formulated pesticide product." Examples are DANGER, WARNING, or CAUTION.

Note again, no trick question here, just confirming that you understand the core concept of this information that is quite important for our safety and the safety of others.

**Final question slide:**

Plants parts such as runners, tuberous roots, stem tips, and underground stems, that are used to produce new plants, is an example of \_\_\_\_\_ reproduction.

## Written Exam Tips

**Answer:** Vegetative

As you are reading through the manual, try to sum up the core lesson in each section or chapter, and be sure to take note of any bold lettering. Sometimes the bold lettering indicates a new topic, other times it might be highlighting a specific word in the text. Generally, it acts as a clue to look for what to pay attention to.

## ID Exam Tips

- The ID exam has 2 annuals, 7 perennials (inc. groundcovers), 1 bulb, 10 shrubs (incl. vines & climbing plants), 5 evergreens, 5 trees, 10 insects, and 10 diseases to identify. You can find the study list on pages 11 – 20.
- The Plant ID portion of the exam is testing on both the scientific and common names of plants, exactly as written in the manual. For example: Genus, then species, then 'cultivar' (if applicable.) Do your best for spelling, and it is recommended practicing on paper or typing out the names if you can. The Insect and Disease portion of the exam tests on the common name only of the pest or disease.
- We can give partial credit if it is clear the exam taker recognizes the core identification of the slide. If you recall the common name but not the scientific - write it in – as you receive partial credit! Not certain how to spell the Latin name or unsure of the species? Our former exam proctor for many years, Dr. Leonard Perry, shares his advice: "Write something, write anything." Don't leave it blank!
- Create your own study materials if you can. You might not end up with the exact photos you find in the exam, but that's part of learning overall plant identification. Ask yourself about structure, texture, leaf shape. Is it opposite or alternate? Do the cones point up or down? These are all tips you would use out in the field for identification purposes. For pests and diseases, consider pulling and comparing multiple photos from the sources we have listed.
- If you have a lot of in-field knowledge of a topic (i.e. you've grown perennials for years) you might not need to spend as much time on them. Identify your own weak spots.
- Think of how many clients or customers will show you poorly lit photos on their cell phones asking what a plant is!

## ID Exam Tips

### Websites to use for Plant ID

- <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderSearch.aspx>
- <https://plantdatabase.uconn.edu/>
- <https://extension.umass.edu/plant-identification/>

# ID Exam Tips

## Websites to use for Pests and Diseases ID:

- <https://www.umass.edu/agriculture-food-environment/landscape/fact-sheets>
- <https://images.bugwood.org/>
- <https://www.umass.edu/agriculture-food-environment/landscape/fact-sheets/insect-identification-online-resources>
- <https://www.vtinvasives.org/>
- <https://insectlab.russell.wisc.edu/>
- <https://cals.cornell.edu/insect-diagnostic-laboratory>
- <https://extension.psu.edu/insects-pests-and-diseases>
- <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-pests-diseases>
- <https://www.umass.edu/agriculture-food-environment/landscape/publications-resources/umass-extensions-professional-management-guide-for-diseases-of-trees-shrubs>

## SAMPLE PLANT | PEST | DISEASE ID SLIDES



= ***Clethra alnifolia*** - Sweet Pepperbush, Summersweet





= *Fothergilla gardenii* - Dwarf Fothergilla



= *Vitus spp.* - Grapes



= ***Abies concolor* – Concolor Fir**



= ***Microbiota decussata* – Russian Cypress**



= *Kalmia latifolia* – Mountain Laurel



= *Betula nigra* – River Birch



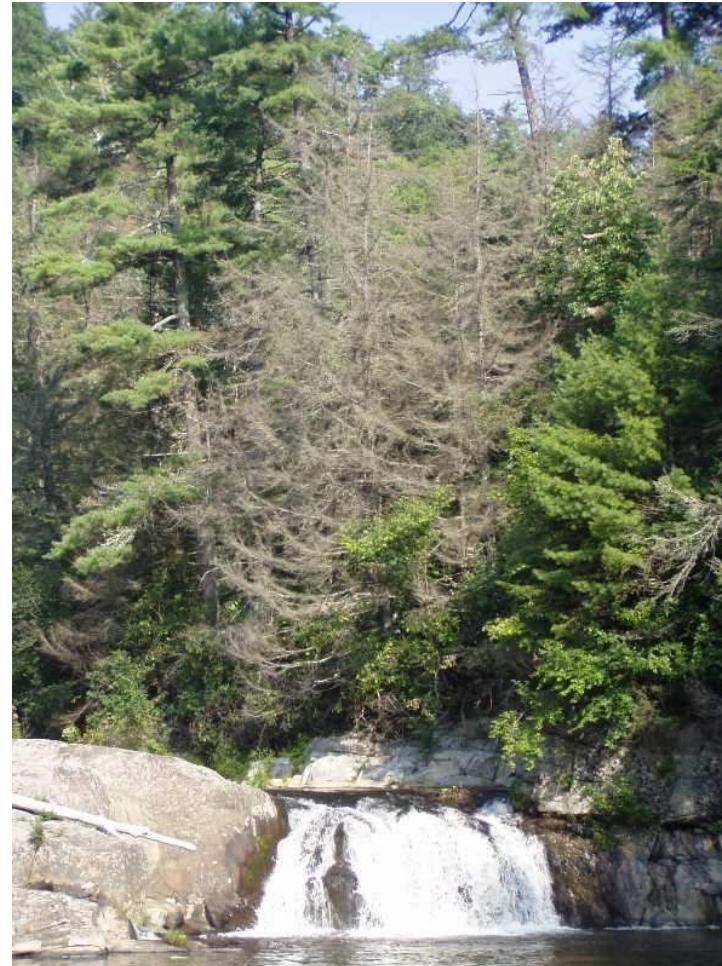
**= *Quercus rubra*– Red Oak**



= *Viola x wittrockiana* – Pansy



= *Tulipa* – Tulip



= Adelgid





= Emerald Ash Borer



**= Anthracnose on Trees**



= Dollar Spot (lawns)



VERMONT CERTIFIED  
HORTICULTURIST

## QUESTIONS???



VERMONT CERTIFIED  
HORTICULTURIST

Please reach out to the VNLA office at  
[hello@vnlavt.org](mailto:hello@vnlavt.org) or to VNLA Board Member/VCH  
Committee Chair Linzy Vos at [linzyvos@gmail.com](mailto:linzyvos@gmail.com).

**GOOD LUCK ON THE EXAM!!!!**