

2017 Young Horticulturist of the Year competition

The winner of New Zealand's overall Young Horticulturist of the Year competition for 2017 is Shanna Hickling.

On winning the competition Shanna became the third woman to gain horticulture's top Young Horticulturist of the Year Award since the competition started in 2004.



Shanna Hickling with her award trophy; and (left to right) Andrew Keaney from T&G, Max Spence from Fruited Supplies and Malcolm Nitschke from AGMARDT.

Shanna is from Riversun Nursery, Gisborne, and earlier in the year was winner of the New Zealand Plant Producers Inc. Young Achiever of the Year. Over two days, on 15–16th November, Shanna competed with three other finalists, all under the age of 30, from different sectors of the horticulture industry in the grand final of the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition held at Auckland Botanic Gardens in Manurewa and the Grand Millennium Hotel, Auckland.

The competition assesses contestants' abilities across multiple skills reflecting the diversity of disciplines demanded by a modern career in horticulture, including innovative product design, market research, public speaking, interviews with judges and a day of practical assignments.

Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture Education Trust Chairperson, Elle Anderson, said she was delighted that this year's competition, considered a strong indicator of who tomorrow's leaders in horticulture will be, had such strong female representation.

"Just making it as one of the finalists in the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture

Education Trust's Young Horticulturist of the Year 2017 competition is an achievement, because each one of the finalists must first win their own sector competition to be eligible.

"This year's New Zealand top grower, top amenity horticulturist and top nursery grower were all women. Horticulture's future looks bright – horticulture is the new black."

"We're very proud of these three young women, and our lone male contestant, all of whom have proven themselves against the best-of-the-best in horticulture."

Andrew Keaney, Executive General Manager, NZ Produce at T&G Global says, "It's extremely positive to see an increased number of young women reaching the finals of this year's competition and demonstrating not only practical but professional ability."

"While the overall split of our industry's workforce is healthy, we need more women to reach leadership positions, something T&G actively supports, to ensure horticulture continues to grow and remains attractive for tomorrow's employees."

Finalists compete for a prize pool valued at more than \$40,000.

1st Place

In taking home the 'Young Horticulturist of the Year' title, Shanna receives \$7,500 of study travel and accommodation to a horticultural destination of her choice from T&G, \$1,000 worth of products from ICL Specialty Fertilizers and a \$100 NZ horticultural magazine subscription for one year.

2nd Place

Tim Adams works for Obsidian Vineyards, Waiheke Island, and earlier in the year won the Young Viticulturist of the Year competition, representing New Zealand Winegrowers. Tim takes home a \$5,500 Massey University study scholarship, \$750 worth of products from ICL Specialty Fertilizers and a \$100 NZ horticultural magazine subscription for one year.

3rd Place

Pippa Lucas works for Auckland Botanic Gardens and earlier in the year won the Young Amenity Horticulturist of the Year competition, representing Amenity Horticulture supported by the New Zealand Recreation Association. Pippa takes home a \$1,000 cash prize, \$500 worth of products from ICL Specialty Fertilizers and a \$100 NZ horticultural magazine subscription for one year.

In addition to the prizes taken out by the top three in the overall competition there are several other awards for specific challenges and projects within the competition.

The AGMARDT Market Innovation Project

Winner: Pippa Lucas



Pippa Lucas receiving the AGMARDT Market Innovation Project Award from Malcolm Nitschke of AGMARDT.

The objective of this project is for the finalists to identify, analyse and report on a market innovation opportunity in the horticulture industry. This challenges contestants to come up with an idea that adds value to the industry. See later in this article for details of individual competitors' AGMARDT (Agricultural and Marketing Research and Development Trust) projects.

Pippa Lucas won the AGMARDT Market Innovation Project top prize of \$5,000 for her well-researched blog/vlog concept, designed to raise youth awareness about careers in horticulture.

Second was Shanna Hickling, winning \$2,500; third Erin Atkinson earning \$1,500; and Tim Adams took away \$500.

The Bayer Best Practice Award

Winner: Tim Adams



Tim Adams receiving the Bayer Best Practice Award from Craig Trembath of Bayer Crop Science.

This award goes to the finalist who receives the highest score in a range of activities with a focus on crop management practices and sustainability during the Grand Final and earned Tim a \$2,500 scholarship.

The T&G Best Practical Activities Award

Winner: Pippa Lucas



Pippa Lucas receiving the T&G Best Practical Activities Award from Andrew Keaney of T&G.

This award goes to the finalist who receives the best overall score for practical activities in the Grand Final and earned Pippa a \$3,500 travel scholarship.

The Fruitfed Supplies Leadership

Winner: Shanna Hickling

This award goes to the finalist who demonstrates outstanding promise and leadership during the competition and earned Shanna a \$2,500 scholarship towards a Leadership or Outward Bound course.

Horticulture Charitable Trust Community Engagement Award

Winner: Erin Atkinson



Erin Atkinson receiving The Horticulture Charitable Trust Community Engagement Award from Tony Ivcevic of Horticulture.

Erin Atkinson is from Apata Group, Te Puke, and winner of Horticulture New Zealand's Young Grower of the Year 2017.

The Community Engagement Award goes to the finalist who receives the highest score for community involvement and earned Erin \$1,500.

Primary ITO Career Development Award

Winner: Pippa Lucas

As the winner of this award, Pippa receives a \$3,000 scholarship, to assist with further study or to attend a conference, and is adopted as a Primary ITO ambassador to promote training and career pathways in horticulture.

The Countdown Best Speech Award

Winner: Tim Adams

Tim Adams was the finalist who achieved the highest score for his speech and receives \$500 cash.

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The Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture Education Trust would like to sincerely thank the following companies for their support:

Young Horticulturist of the Year

Partners: AGMARDT, T&G Global, Fruitfed Supplies.

Young Horticulturist of the Year

Supporters: Bayer New Zealand, Countdown, Horticulture Trust, Primary ITO, *NZ Gardener* magazine, Trillian Trust.

Young Horticulturist of the Year

Affiliated Supporters: Auckland Botanic Gardens, ANZ, City Parks Services, Hill Laboratories, ICL Specialty Fertilizers, Iron Road, Manukau Institute of Technology School of Primary Industries, Massey University, Norwood Industries, NZ Gourmet, NZ Winegrowers, Nga-Rakau Nurseries, Safeworx.

Friends to the Competition: Auckland Botanic Gardens, Cornwall Park Trust, Lyndale Liners, Riversun Nursery, Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture.

The competition is managed by the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture Education Trust.

The AGMARDT Market Innovation Projects

AGMARDT is the Agricultural and Marketing Research and Development Trust and its general manager, Malcolm Nitschke, says innovation is important but the ability to take an idea and execute it, is paramount.

"The world is full of good ideas. The thing that signals the potential of a leader is his or her ability to show how they would take an innovative idea from market analysis through to commercialisation."

Sustainability and technology were common themes in this year's innovation leg of the Young Horticulturist of the Year 2017 competition.

The AGMARDT Market Innovation Project, which tests a contestant's ability to identify, analyse and report on a market innovation opportunity, is a key component of the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition.

This year, contestants worked on ideas that range from how to help horticulturists go organic, to a potting mix sampler, to recruiting strategies, and to a product that reduces environmental and personal exposure to agrichemicals.

Erin Atkinson (30) – Young Vegetable Grower of the Year 2017

Innovation: Organic Conversion Services

Erin's AGMARDT project was a business plan for a service to provide kiwifruit growers with the support and resources needed to convert an existing orchard or establish a new orchard to be certified organic, with the aim of supporting greater conversion to organic production.

"Currently there is no one within kiwifruit offering this service, or driving the conversion to organics. As the world moves towards sustainable management, we as an industry also need to consider this," Atkinson said.

Shanna Hickling (25) – New Zealand Plant Producers Inc. Young Achiever 2017

Innovation: The Suremix Sampler

The electrical conductivity (EC) and pH of potting mix is essential to the health of the potted plants. Horticultural companies carry out regular potting mix testing to ensure EC and pH are

at the optimum levels. The potting mix sampler tool currently in use is a teaspoon with an extension on the handle.

"It is slow to use, collects too much potting mix, and risks disturbing the roots of the potted plants. My innovation alters the classic soil core sampler so that it can be used for sampling potting mix from potted plants."

"Its design allows for a small sample to be taken and we predict it will make sampling more time efficient and lower the damage to plant's roots," Hickling said.

Pippa Lucas (26) – Amenity Horticulturist of the Year 2017

Innovation: A blog/vlog designed to raise youth awareness about a career in horticulture

The blog will run a series of campaigns across social media platforms, aimed at inspiring a career in horticulture among the most regular users of the platforms, 13–23 year-olds already with an interest in gardening.

"The social media side of the business will be further strengthened by a blog style website that will host novel content aimed at changing the perceptions that horticulture is a low paid job for those that have not done well academically."

"We will have a brand ambassador to tell stories, to connect personally, showing that horticulture is a diverse industry and important for sustainability and human health," Lucas said.

Tim Adams (30) – NZ Wine Growers Young Viticulturist of the Year 2017

Innovation: Mixflow

Mixflow is centred on agrichemical handling and increasing safety by decreasing user exposure.

"The product will allow chemicals to be measured and added to a volume of water in a closed system. It will achieve this through the use of the Venturi Effect and a variety of other fluid measuring techniques," Adams said.



Erin Atkinson in action at one of the practical challenge questions.



Finalists in the 2017 Young Horticulturist of the Year competition; (left to right) Pippa Lucas, Shanna Hickling, Tim Adams, Erin Atkinson.



Pippa Lucas pruning during one of the practical challenge questions.



Shanna Hickling responding to questions from judges during the practical challenge sessions.