



## COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
<b><i>Herbal Gardens: Medieval Texts, Philosophical Roots, and Botanical Practice</i></b> <i>Žolelių sodai: viduramžių tekstai, filosofinės ištakos ir botanikos praktika</i>	

Lecturers	Department(s) where the course unit (module) is delivered
<b>Coordinator:</b> Teach. Asst. Rūta Šileikytė Zukienė Dr. Regina Juodkaitė Assist. Prof., Dr. Rūta Šlapkauskaitė	Institute for the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic, Centre for Scandinavian Studies

Study cycle	Type of the course unit (module)
BA programme	Elective

Mode of delivery	Period when the course unit (module) is delivered	Language(s) of instruction
Seminars	Spring semester	English

Requirements for students	
<b>Prerequisites:</b> C1–C2 level of English	<b>Additional requirements (if any):</b> –

Number of ECTS credits allocated	Student's workload (total)	Contact hours	Individual work
5 ECTS	140	40	100

Purpose of the course unit
<p><b><i>Herbal Gardens: Medieval Texts, Philosophical Roots, and Botanical Practice</i></b> invites students to explore how people in the Middle Ages thought about plants, gardens, and healing – not only through words, but through lived experience. This <b>interdisciplinary</b> course combines medieval literature, philosophy, and hands-on botanical practice to rediscover gardens as spaces of knowledge, imagination, and inner cultivation.</p> <p>We will read medieval texts such as <i>Hortulus</i>, the <i>Nine Herbs Charm</i>, the writings of Hildegard of Bingen, and <i>The Romance of the Rose</i>, uncovering how nature was perceived as both a physical and spiritual landscape. Alongside this, we will trace the philosophical roots of these traditions in</p>

classical thought — from Plato’s vision of the soul’s rootedness in the divine to the Stoic and Epicurean ideas of harmony with nature.

Extending beyond the medieval world, the course will also turn to later English literary reimaginings of the garden and its meanings, from the Victorian era’s “botanical imaginaries” to Christina Rossetti’s theological and erotic botanizing in *Goblin Market*. Drawing on readings such as Theresa Kelley’s “Botanizing Women” and Catriona Sandilands’ “Vegetate,” we will explore how gardens became sites where questions of gender, embodiment, and ecological kinship intertwined, and where the vegetal and the human imaginations met.

The course is **experiential** by design. Through practical sessions at Vilnius University Botanical Garden, students will learn to identify and grow historical herbs, keep reflection journals, and collaborate on creating a small medieval-style herbal garden. These activities aim to connect intellectual insight with **embodied experience** – to see, touch, and think with plants.

Ultimately, the course encourages **holistic learning**: reading gardens as we read texts, and reading ourselves within both. By engaging with the material and symbolic dimensions of the garden – medieval and modern, philosophical and poetic – students will develop their ability to think metaphorically, reflect ethically, and approach knowledge as a living and growing practice.

Learning outcomes of the course unit	Teaching and learning methods	Assessment methods
<p>Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Analyse and interpret</b> key medieval texts related to herbal gardens and medicinal plants, demonstrating awareness of their cultural, philosophical, and symbolic dimensions.</li> <li><b>Identify and discuss</b> the philosophical background of medieval representations of gardens within classical and Hellenistic traditions.</li> <li><b>Integrate experiential learning and intellectual reflection</b>, using embodied observation, sensory engagement, and emotional and imaginative awareness that all deepen our understanding of medieval thought and its ecological and ethical implications.</li> <li><b>Engage collaboratively in the practical recreation of a historical herbal garden</b>, applying the newly gained knowledge of medieval sources and plant lore.</li> <li><b>Demonstrate holistic and reflective thinking</b> by maintaining a learning journal that combines textual</li> </ol>	<p>The course combines <b>theoretical inquiry, textual analysis, and experiential engagement</b>.</p> <p>Learning takes shape through a reciprocal process of reflection and practice, following <b>David Kolb’s experiential learning cycle</b>: concrete experience → reflective observation → abstract conceptualisation → active experimentation.<sup>(1)</sup></p> <p><b>Seminars and discussions</b> provide an interactive space for close reading of medieval texts, comparative philosophical reflection, and critical dialogue.</p> <p><b>Collaborative projects</b> invite students to design and present interpretations of historical garden layouts, fostering teamwork and creative synthesis across disciplines.</p> <p><b>Reflective and research-based tasks</b>, such as keeping experiential (reflective) journals, promote embodied learning and critical self-awareness.</p>	<p>The course employs <b>accumulative assessment</b> designed to evaluate both continuous engagement and final attainment of learning outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Attendance and active participation</b> – 10% <i>Assesses students’ involvement in discussions and practical activities during seminars.</i></li> <li><b>Oral presentation</b> on a chosen topic – 30% <i>Evaluates students’ ability to research, analyse, and creatively present features of a chosen text or topic in the course.</i></li> <li><b>Reflective Learning Journal</b> – 60% <i>Instead of a conventional exam, students maintain a Reflective Learning Journal throughout the semester, both recording and mirroring their learning process.</i></li> </ol>

analysis, creative expression, and personal insight.		
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(<sup>1</sup>) Jeb Schenk and Jessie Cruickshank, “Evolving Kolb: Experiential Education in the Age of Neuroscience.” *Journal of Experiential Education* 2015, Vol. 38(1), 73–95.

Content: breakdown of the topics	Contact hours							Individual work: time and assignments	
	Lectures	Tutorials	Seminars	Workshop	Laboratory work	Internship/work	Contact hours	Individual work	Tasks for individual work
<b>Introduction. Medieval herbal gardens</b> – forms and patterns. The garden as a microcosm: nature, order, and divine harmony. Healing, cultivation, and monastic knowledge. Spatial symbolism: enclosure, centre, and path.			4						<p>Students are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Read the assigned materials</b> (reading lists will be provided before the course) and prepare for seminar discussions;</li> <li>• <b>Prepare for an oral presentation</b> on a selected text or discussion topic;</li> <li>• <b>Engage in independent research</b> on themes and problems discussed in the course.</li> <li>• <b>Reflect on seminar themes</b> through short written notes or creative tasks.</li> </ul>
<b>Textual Gardens.</b> The module explores Walahfrid Strabo’s <i>Hortulus</i> as an early monastic meditation on cultivation and order, the <i>Old English Nine Herbs Charm</i> as a bridge between pre-Christian and Christian healing traditions, and the visionary writings of Hildegard of Bingen as examples of spiritual and medicinal botany. The module concludes with <i>The Romance of the Rose</i> , examining the allegorical transformation of the garden into a site of desire, knowledge, and moral reflection.			8						
<b>Reconstructing a Medieval Herbal Garden:</b> Project Presentations and Reflection. Historical accuracy vs. imaginative reconstruction. The act of gardening as interpretation and remembrance.			2						
<b>Greek and Hellenistic Gardens.</b> Archaeological remains and reconstructed plans of Greek and Hellenistic gardens. The influence of Persian <i>paradeisoi</i> on Hellenistic garden culture. Gardens and water: fountains, channels, and irrigation as aesthetic and symbolic features. Sacred groves and royal gardens: spaces of worship, power, and contemplation.			4						
<b>Philosophers’ Gardens.</b> The module starts with Plato’s vision of the human as a “ <i>heavenly plant</i> ” ( <i>Timaeus</i> 90a–d) and the metaphor of ascent and rootedness in <i>Phaedrus</i> . Aristotle’s Lyceum as a physical garden of empirical observation and as a symbol of the ordered cultivation of knowledge. Epicurus’s Garden as a model of simplicity and friendship grounded in sensory experience and the ethics of pleasure. Seneca and later Stoic writers’ interpretation of garden as an inner space. Gardens as models of virtue. Physical environments of ancient philosophical schools and their pedagogical significance.			8						

<b>Reconstructing the Philosopher's Garden:</b> Project Presentations and Reflection.			2						
<b>Plants and Human Subjectivity.</b> Theresa Kelley's "Botanizing Women", Catriona Sandilands' "Vegetate". Victorian England's botanical imaginaries. Christina Rossetti's theological botanizing. Rewriting Eden: the vegetal, the erotic, and the fantastic in <i>Goblin Market</i> . The poetics of the list and the ethics of kinship. The garden vs. the marketplace. The female body and the goblin fruit. Seduction, sacrifice, redemption.			4						
<b>Practice in the Botanical Garden.</b> Cultivating the medieval herbarium: preparing soil beds, sowing and tending selected herbs from medieval sources; reflecting on the sensory and contemplative dimensions of the work.				8					
<b>Total:</b>			<b>32</b>	<b>8</b>			<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>	

Assessment strategy	Weight, %	Deadline	Assessment criteria
<b>Attendance and active participation</b>	10	—	<p>Evaluation is based on the student's engagement, preparation, and contribution during seminars.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Attendance:</b> Regular and punctual attendance is required. More than four unjustified absences may negatively affect the grade.</li> <li>• <b>Preparation:</b> Demonstrates consistent familiarity with assigned readings and readiness to discuss them.</li> <li>• <b>Participation and engagement:</b> Actively contributes to class discussions with relevant, thoughtful, and respectful comments. Shows interest in peers' presentations and activities; participates constructively in group work.</li> </ul>
<b>Oral presentation on a chosen topic</b>	30	To be assigned	<p>Student performance in the oral presentation will be assessed according to the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relevance and depth of content (30%)</b> – Demonstrates thorough understanding of the chosen language; presents accurate and relevant historical, linguistic, and cultural information.</li> <li>• <b>Structure and organisation (20%)</b> – The presentation is clearly structured, well-timed, and logically developed from introduction to conclusion.</li> <li>• <b>Analytical insight (20%)</b> – Provides thoughtful commentary on distinctive linguistic or literary features; shows ability to interpret examples critically.</li> <li>• <b>Delivery and communication (15%)</b> – Speaks clearly and confidently; maintains good contact with the audience; uses visual and/or audio aids effectively.</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Engagement and response (15%)</b> – Encourages discussion, responds thoughtfully to questions, and shows ability to adapt explanations to audience needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Reflective Learning Journal</b>	60	<b>Midterm</b> evaluation – end of March;  <b>Final</b> evaluation – exam days in June.	<p>The <i>Reflective Learning Journal</i> is the main assessment tool of the course, designed to document students' intellectual and experiential development through reading, reflection, and practical engagement.</p> <p>Entries are to be made <b>at least once per week</b> (a minimum of 15 entries per semester, with no fewer than one A5 page per entry), combining teacher-guided reflections with the student's independent insights, notes, and creative responses.</p> <p>Assessment will take place <b>twice during the semester</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Midterm evaluation (40%)</b> – focuses on engagement with readings and class discussions; quality of reflection on medieval texts and philosophical themes; clarity and coherence of thought.</li> <li>• <b>Final evaluation (60%)</b> – focuses on the integration of theory and practice, particularly insights gained through practical work in the Botanical Garden; evidence of intellectual growth, sensory awareness, and holistic understanding.</li> </ul> <p>An excellent journal will demonstrate <b>consistent weekly work</b>, thoughtful self-reflection, and <b>independent research</b> (additional readings, observations, and conceptual connections) that expand upon the themes, authors, and problems discussed in the course.</p> <p>Evaluation emphasises <b>depth, coherence, and originality</b> rather than formal perfection.</p>

#### **10-POINT GRADING SCALE (REFLECTIVE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY EVALUATION)**

**10 (Excellent)** – *Exceptional insight and intellectual maturity.* Demonstrates outstanding depth of reflection, originality, and independent thinking. Integrates medieval, philosophical, and botanical perspectives with exceptional coherence. The student goes beyond the expected scope, showing creativity and a holistic understanding of the subject. (95–100% of learning goals achieved)

**9 (Very Good)** – *Strong and consistent engagement.* Demonstrates very good comprehension and synthesis of ideas. Reflections are perceptive, well-structured, and often show independent exploration or creative associations. Minor gaps in depth or precision may appear, but the overall work is coherent and insightful. (85–94% of learning goals achieved)

**8 (Good)** – *Thoughtful and analytical work.* Shows solid understanding and clear effort to connect theory and experience. Demonstrates analysis and reflection, though the synthesis may at times remain surface-level or somewhat conventional. Some independent insights are present. (75–84% of learning goals achieved)

**7 (Average)** – *Competent but uneven reflection.* Demonstrates comprehension of main ideas and an ability to apply them, but with limited depth or originality. Reflection may be descriptive rather than analytical, and integration between practice and theory remains partial. (65–74% of learning goals achieved)

**6 (Satisfactory) – Basic understanding with noticeable gaps.** Reflection is limited in scope or depth, with a tendency to summarise rather than interpret. Shows effort but lacks consistent engagement or clarity in linking textual and experiential learning. (55–64% of learning goals achieved)

**5 (Weak) – Minimal achievement of goals.** Demonstrates fragmentary understanding or sporadic engagement. Reflections lack coherence, independence, or meaningful synthesis of the course themes. (50–54% of learning goals achieved)

**1–4 (Failing) – Insufficient achievement of the course’s learning goals.** The work demonstrates little or no understanding of key ideas, lacks engagement with readings or practical activities, or shows no evidence of reflective or independent thought. Entries may be missing, off-topic, or purely descriptive without analysis or synthesis. Overall, the student fails to meet the minimum criteria for a passing performance. (0–49% of learning goals achieved)

#### PASSING REQUIREMENTS:

The course follows accumulative evaluation. To pass, students must achieve a passing grade (50% or higher) **in each of the three assessment components**: attendance and participation, oral presentation, and reflective journaling.

Failure to reach 50% in any one component results in **failing the entire course**, regardless of scores in the other segments.

#### ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance is **compulsory** for this course. Students who miss **more than 30% of the seminars** without a **valid reason** (such as medical or other officially documented circumstances) will **not be allowed to take the final exam** and will receive a **failing grade** for the course. Regular participation is essential for successful language acquisition and overall course progression.

### COURSE LITERATURE

#### Primary Sources

Author(s)	Year of publication	Title	Publishing place and house or web link
Cicero	1971	<i>De Senectute</i> , from <i>Cicero</i> trans. by W. A. Falconer	London
Epicurus	1926	<i>Letter to Menoeceus</i> . In <i>Epicurus: The Extant Remains</i> , translated by Cyril Bailey	Oxford: Clarendon Press
Grendon, Felix	1909	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Charms</i> (Originally published in <i>The Journal of American Folk-Lore</i> , 1909, vol. XXII, no. LXXIV)	Columbia University Press. <a href="#">Public domain: Viewable online at Archive.org.</a>
Hopkins, Joseph S.	2020	“Nigon Wyrta Galdor: The Old English Nine Plants Spell or the Nine Herbs Charm”	Mimisbrunnr.info. URL: <a href="https://www.mimisbrunnr.info/nigon-wyrta-galdor">https://www.mimisbrunnr.info/nigon-wyrta-galdor</a>
Hopkins, Joseph S.	2024	<i>The Nine Plants Spell: Nigon Wyrta Galdor</i> .	Olympia: Hyldyr.
Horgan, Frances, trans. and annot.	1999	<i>The Romance of the Rose</i>	Oxford: Oxford UP

Plato	1929	<i>Timaeus</i> . Translated by R. G. Bury. In <i>Plato, Vol. IX: Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles</i> . Loeb Classical Library 234.	Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd.
Rossetti, Christina	1994	<i>Goblin Market and Other Poems</i>	London: Dover Thrift Editions
Strabo, Walafrid	1966	<i>Hortulus</i> . Translated by Raef Payne. Commentary by Wilfrid Blunt	Pittsburgh, PA: The Hunt Botanical Library
Strubel, Armand, ed., trans, and annot.	1992	<i>Le Roman de la Rose</i> . Lettres gothiques, 4533	Paris: Librairie Générale Française – Livre de Poche

## Secondary Literature

Author(s)	Year of publication	Title	Publishing place and house or web link
Ahmadimoghaddam, Ali, and Saeid Khaghani	2025	“The Garden of Philosophy: A Nature-Oriented Idea of University.” <i>Journal of Art and Architecture Studies</i> 14, no. 1 (2025): 20–33.	DOI: <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.54203/jaas.2025.3">https://dx.doi.org/10.54203/jaas.2025.3</a>
Albers, Lucia H.	1991	“The Perception of Gardening as Art,” <i>Garden History</i> , Autumn, Vol. 19, No. 2, 163–174	
Bayard, T.	1997	<i>Sweet herbs and sundry flowers: Medieval gardens and the gardens of the cloisters</i> .	Metropolitan Museum of Art. <a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/met-publications/sweet-herbs-and-sundry-flowers-medieval-gardens-and-the-gardens-of-the-cloisters">https://www.metmuseum.org/met-publications/sweet-herbs-and-sundry-flowers-medieval-gardens-and-the-gardens-of-the-cloisters</a>
Bullington, Judy	2021	“East-West relational imaginaries: Classical Chinese gardens & self cultivation” <i>Educational Philosophy and Theory</i> 56:4, 299-304	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1965875">https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1965875</a>
Campbell, Gordon	2010	“Epicurus, the Garden, and the Golden Age.” In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 220–231.	Wiley-Blackwell
Carroll, Maureen	2003	<i>Earthly paradises: Ancient gardens in history and archaeology</i> . This general, readable account of gardens from Egypt, the Near East, Greece, and Rome is the best overview and introduction. While a popular book, it incorporates recent scholarship and is organized thematically.	London: British Museum.
Coleman, Kathleen, and Pascale Derron, eds.	2014	<i>Le jardin dans l'Antiquité: Introduction et huit exposés suivis de discussions</i> . Proceedings of a conference held 19–23 August 2013. Vandoeuvres, Switzerland:	Vandoeuvres, Switzerland: Fondation Hardt.

		<p>Fondation Hardt pour l'Étude de l'Antiquité Classique.</p> <p>Intellectually stimulating proceedings from a conference held 19–23 August 2013 under the auspices of the Fondation Hardt with an introduction and eight highly focused essays on topics ranging from real and painted Egyptian gardens to the real and imagined gardens of early Christians.</p>	
Cotton, Anne	2010	“Gardener of Souls: Philosophical Education in Plato’s <i>Phaedrus</i> .” In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 232–244.	Wiley-Blackwell
Day, Jo	2010	“Plants, Prayers, and Power: The Story of the First Mediterranean Gardens.” In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 65–78.	Wiley-Blackwell
Dendle, Peter	2015	“Plants in the Early Medieval Cosmos: Herbs, Divine Potency, and the <i>Scala Natura</i> .” In <i>Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden</i> , edited by Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide, 1–18	Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer
Dendle, Peter, and Alain Touwaide, eds.	2015	<p><i>Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden</i></p> <p>This collection explores medicinal plants in medieval thought across Western, Byzantine, and Arabic traditions, with essays on gardens, herbals, charms and medicine.</p>	Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer
Evans, Susan Toby	2010	“The Garden of the Aztec Philosopher-King.” In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 207–219.	Wiley-Blackwell
Gleason, Kathryn L.	2013	<p><i>A cultural history of gardens in Antiquity</i></p> <p>The essays in this important collection discuss major themes in the study of ancient gardens, including design, typologies, plantings, use and reception, meaning, verbal and visual representations of gardens, and the relationship between the garden and the larger landscape.</p>	London: Bloomsbury
Kelley, Theresa	2012	<i>Clandestine Marriage. Botany and Romantic Culture</i>	Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press
Landsberg, Sylvia	2003	<p><i>The Medieval Garden, 2nd ed.</i> — Provides a historical discussion of various medieval garden types (monastic, utilitarian, pleasure) and their plantings, designs and uses.</p> <p><i>Ch. 1: Types of Medieval Gardens</i>  <i>Ch. 3: The Plants</i>  <i>Ch. 4 The Practice of Medieval Gardening</i>  <i>Ch. 6: Make your own Medieval Garden</i></p>	Toronto: University of Toronto Press



Larkin, Deirdre	2015	<i>“Hortus Redivivus: The Medieval Garden Recreated.”</i> In <i>Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden</i> , edited by Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide, 165–184	Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer
Macaulay, Elizabeth R.	2021	<i>Greek and Roman Gardens</i>	<a href="https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0134.xml">https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0134.xml</a>
MacDonald, Eric	2010	<i>“Hortus Incantans: Gardening as an Art of Enchantment.”</i> In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 121–134.	Wiley-Blackwell
Masson, Georgina	1966	<i>Italian Gardens</i>	London
Noble, C.	2000	“Spiritual practice and the designed landscape: Monastic precinct gardens.” <i>Studies in the History of Gardens &amp; Designed Landscapes</i> , 20(3), 197–205.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2000.10435620">https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2000.10435620</a>
O’Brien, Dan (ed.)	2010	<i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i>	In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 26–37.
Ott, K., & Surau-Ott, V.	2024	<i>Philosophy of gardening and a sense for scents: An environmental ethics perspective. Studies in the History of Gardens &amp; Designed Landscapes</i> , 44(2–3), 178–196.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2024.2367930">https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2024.2367930</a>
Ray, Meghan T.	2010	“Cultivating the soul: the ethics of gardening in ancient Greece and Rome.” In Dan O’Brien, <i>Gardening: Cultivating Wisdom</i> , 26–37.	Wiley-Blackwell
Salisbury, Joyce ed.	1993	<i>The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of Essays</i> Garland Medieval Casebooks, 5.)	New York and London: Garland
Sandilands, Catriona	2017	“Vegetate” in <i>Veer Ecology. A Companion to Environmental Thinking</i> .	Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press
Strong, Roy	1975	<i>The Renaissance Garden in England</i>	London
Touwaide, Alain	2015	“Legacy of Classical Antiquity in Byzantium and the West.” In <i>Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden</i> , edited by Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide, 19–38.	Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer
Van Arsdall, Anne	2023	<i>Medieval Herbal Remedies: The Old English Herbarium and Early-Medieval Medicine</i> . 2nd ed.	Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge

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