

Job: PhD student

What do you do?

I am a PhD student at the University of Exeter. My research looks at a 'good guy' of agriculture: the fungus *Trichoderma hamatum* GD12 (below). *Trichoderma* can increase plant growth and help protect plants by controlling pathogens in the surrounding soil. This means that the fungus can be used as an environmentally friendly alternative to chemical sprays and fertilizers (see image below).



Odette Wills



CV

- PhD Student Biosciences, University of Exeter.
- MSc Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture, University of Exeter.
- BSc Conservation Science, University of Exeter.

What is your average day like?

I spend time mostly with my team mates in the laboratory; everyone is very friendly and willing to help each other out.

I also help teach undergraduate students during practical lessons. It's fun to pass on your knowledge and experience to others.



Which part of your job do you most enjoy?

There are always opportunities to gain skills. I have been to many workshops on useful topics, such as science communication. You can also attend conferences in exotic places, such as New Zealand or Thailand.

You are in charge of your own time during a PhD, which is brilliant as you can fit your work around gym classes and social gatherings. Although you do have to be quite self-disciplined to get everything done!

When did you become interested in plant pathology?

My Masters project got me hooked on plant pathology! It focused on *Fusarium solani* a world-wide fungal pathogen, which infects food plants such as tomatoes, peas and peppers.

It is fantastic to think that discoveries you make in the laboratory or field could help solve a real life problem faced by a farmer.

Why is plant pathology important?

Plant pathogens infect and kill food plants. By tackling plant diseases we can help decrease plant loss, meaning more food can be produced from the same area of land. This helps to preserve other important habitats, which could be destroyed to grow food crops.

Plant pathogens also need to be stopped because they cause diseases, such as Dutch elm and Ash dieback, which are destroying UK forests.