

Arborist

Climb, prune and remove trees, often with a chainsaw at height. Well paid near power lines, and one of the more dangerous trades.

TYPICAL PAY

\$62,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$44k to \$85k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Tree care companies, utilities, city forestry crews, golf courses

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Grade 12 with biology, math and physical education. Fitness matters more than marks here.
- 2 Start as a groundworker** Months
Tree care companies hire in spring. You drag brush, run the chipper and learn knots. Chainsaw safety and first aid courses come first.
- 3 Register an apprenticeship** 2 to 3 years
Ontario's Arborist trade (code 444A) needs 6,120 hours: 5,400 on the job plus 720 in school, about 3 years. BC has Arborist Technician, Climbing Arborist and Utility Arborist programs through SkilledTradesBC.
- 4 ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) Certified Arborist** After 3 years
The credential the industry recognizes. Needs about 3 years of experience, or a related degree plus experience, then an exam. Many employers require it for lead roles.
- 5 Specialize** Ongoing
Utility arborist (line clearing), crane and rigging, or a college diploma in urban forestry to move into municipal planning and consulting.

Pros and cons

- + Outdoors, physical, never a desk
- + Paid from day one, licence optional
- + Utility and city jobs come with pensions
- One of the most dangerous trades in Canada
- Chainsaws at height, in all weather
- Hard on shoulders, hands and hearing

Good to know

Falls, saws and wires

Tree work consistently ranks among the most dangerous jobs in North America. Falls, chainsaw cuts, being struck by limbs and contact with power lines are the main causes. Training and gear are not optional.

Ice storms make careers

The 1998 ice storm in Ontario and Quebec brought down millions of trees and put every arborist in eastern Canada on overtime for months. Big storms still do.

Optional boosts

Utility arborist. ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) Certified Tree Climber. Crane and rigging. Tree risk assessment qualification.

Where these numbers come from

Skilled Trades Ontario: Arborist

SkilledTradesBC: Arborist Technician

International Society of Arboriculture: Credentials

Job Bank: Arborists (landscape and horticulture technicians and specialists), wages (updated Nov 2025)

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/arborist>



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