

Landscapers



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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Occupational Subtitles:

- Grounds Maintenance Workers
- Grounds Managers
- Landscape Contractors
- Landscape Laborers

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Cemetery Workers
- Tree Surgeons
- Weed Inspectors

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Christmas-Tree Graders
- Horticultural Workers
- Nursery Managers

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- First-Line Supervisors and Managers/
Supervisors - Logging Workers
- Nursery Workers
- Property, Real Estate, and Community
Association Managers
- Range Managers

Noteworthy Quote:

“Enthusiasm and a willingness to learn are top qualities lawn and landscape companies are looking for in employees. Many high school and two-year vocational-technical school graduates as well as retirees are entering the field. Whether your interest lies in customer service, sales and marketing, management or outdoor work, the Green Industry has a job for you.”

Tom Delaney
Executive Vice President
of PLCAA
Marietta, Georgia

Landscapers (‘land-scap-ers) plan, create, and maintain the grounds of industrial, residential, institutional, and public properties.

Landscaping has existed for centuries. From the hanging gardens of ancient Babylon to Central Park in New York City, landscapes, gardens, parks, lawns, and ornamental plants have provided beauty across the ages. Landscaped grounds with their cool shade trees, running brooks, and bright flowers make pleasant places for people to rest or picnic. They may also be used to stop erosion, muffle noise, and remove pollutants from the air and environment.

In 2001, the U.S. landscaping industry (or green industry) generated a total income of over \$61 billion. Of that, \$1.25 billion was spent on the design, installation, and maintenance of interior plants alone. Such a wealthy industry helps to employ a wide range of workers. For example, horticulturists study the science of growing plants; nursery managers oversee the growing of plants, trees, and shrubs; and arborists are experts on trees. Landscape architects and designers plan landscapes; while landscapers and other grounds maintenance workers are responsible for arranging and maintaining landscapes and other premises.

Work Performed

Landscapers, also known as *lawn care professionals*, with the help of other *grounds maintenance workers*, plan and carry out landscaping operations. Landscaping operations include cultivation and maintenance of grounds of private residences, businesses, schools, governmental buildings, hospitals, highways and roadsides, churches, apartment and housing complexes, and other institutions. They work with *landscape laborers* preparing and grading grounds; applying fertilizers and insecticides; planting and transplanting shrubs, plants, and trees; and seeding, sodding, maintaining, and repairing lawns.



Landscapers plan, create, and maintain the grounds of industrial, residential, institutional, and public properties.
Photo by Dwight Englewood

They consider how the land will be used, whether traffic will be light or heavy, whether the arrangement will be formal or informal, and other elements affecting project layout and construction. They must use seed mixtures, fertilizers, plants, shrubs, and trees recommended for particular kinds of soil and geographic locations and climates.

Landscapers begin by first studying the design drawings or blueprints for the given site. They look at the specifications and the bill of materials to figure the scope and cost of the project. Large landscaping projects can cover—besides lawns, trees, and plants—lights, sprinkler systems, fences, statues, monuments, fountains, benches, retaining walls, roads and paths, lakes, bridges, and waterfalls. Landscapers may do all the work, or they may hire specialists to install things such as lighting or sprinkler systems.

Some landscapers design, plan, plant, place structures, and maintain a site. Others may simply install the landscape features listed in the plans of an architect or designer. Some only maintain a site or area. Many firms and homeowners hire *landscape contractors* to take care of their grounds. Landscape contractors are self-employed or work for independent landscaping firms, and work for various clients on a contract basis. However, some large businesses, college campuses, industrial plants, shopping malls, medical centers, housing communities, cemeteries, amusement parks, botanical gardens and arboretums, sports fields, golf courses, and other such sites may have full-time *grounds keepers*, *grounds managers*, or *grounds superintendents*.

To begin a project, landscapers plan the work. They make sure equipment and supplies (trees, plants, grass seed, concrete, etc.) are ready or on order. For large projects, they assign jobs to laborers and other grounds maintenance workers.

Grounds maintenance workers trim shrubs and hedges, prune trees and plants, and sometimes help grow plants and flowers. They weed, hoe, edge, thin, mulch, and cultivate all kinds of gardens—formal or casual, extensive or modest. They fertilize lawns and take measures to control weeds, insects, and disease. They also mow, seed, sod, aerate, and dethatch lawns.

They may prepare trenches and beds for planting and install drain tiles. They may build fences, stairs, decks, and trellises. They may install or repair concrete, asphalt, gravel, or other kinds of walks and driveways. They keep grounds evenly trimmed and clean. Frequently, they prepare compost from clippings, fallen leaves, and other organic debris.

In their work landscape workers use hand tools such as rakes, shovels, picks, trowels, and spades. They also operate tractors, skid loaders, rototillers, trenchers, chain saws, circular saws, and other power equipment. They may use backpack blowers, string trimmers, edgers, sprayers, spreaders, and posthole diggers. They may drive tractors, gang mowers, bulldozers, trucks, snowblowers, and snowploughs. Landscape workers may make minor repairs and maintenance on equipment such as lawn mowers or snow removal equipment.

Landscape contractors and grounds maintenance workers with management responsibilities study landscape maintenance schedules, set up job assignments, and instruct workers. They set work procedures and inspect the work to make sure it meets design plans as well as federal and state regulations. They also keep time and production records, and prepare a budget to cover the costs of materials, equipment, and supplies. Managers may also have marketing and sales responsibilities or oversee the marketing and sales department.

Full-time year-round landscapers and grounds maintenance workers usually do cleanup, renovative pruning, and maintenance in fall and winter seasons. They repair fences, gates, and walls. They paint fences and outbuildings, and clean out drainage ditches and culverts. In northern states they remove snow from walks and driveways. Landscapers may have extensive repair work after storms that damage buildings, grounds, shrubs, and trees.

Working Conditions

Landscapers in some parts of the United States plan their work around the seasons. Since they work outdoors, they often contend with bad weather. Much of the work requires standing, kneeling, bending, and lifting. Some of the work is strenuous, and most of it requires the operation or use of tools, machinery, and equipment. Landscapers and grounds keepers may be under pressure to finish a job, especially when they are working at the end of the season, or are preparing for a scheduled event. All grounds maintenance workers use care when handling chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Federal and state standards control the use of pesticides. They must also be cautious when using power tools such as lawn mowers, chainsaws, and power shears.

Hours and Earnings

Landscapers and grounds maintenance workers work during daylight hours. They may work fifty or sixty hours a week in the spring, summer, and fall. They generally work forty hours a week during the winter months, but may work longer hours if there is a snow emergency. The workweek may include weekends. Many laborers are employed only part-time. Most people in this work take vacations in off-seasons.

Earnings for landscaping and grounds keeping workers vary with education, experience, job duties, employer, and geographic location. For example, independent contractors, and landscapers who work for local government, tend to earn the highest wages. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2000, earnings for landscape contractors, like other construction managers, ranged from \$58,000 to \$100,000 a year. Most wages for supervisors and managers of landscaping, lawn service, and grounds keeping workers ranged from \$10 to over \$20 an hour (\$20,000 to \$40,000 a year). The median wage was \$14.70 an hour (about \$30,000 a year). All other landscaping and grounds keeping workers earn anywhere

from minimum wage to over \$15 an hour (\$11,000 to \$30,000 a year). The average median wage for these workers was around \$10.44 an hour (about \$22,000 a year).

Education and Training

High school students interested in landscaping or grounds keeping should take agriculture and science courses. Geometry, algebra, biology, chemistry, general mathematics, and business courses will prove helpful. In addition, high school students can benefit from enrollment in a vocational agriculture program or the Future Farmers of America (FFA).

Generally, there is no minimum educational requirement for this field. Individuals who want to go beyond manual labor in this field, however, should prepare for entry to a two-year or a four-year college. They should consider studies in grounds management, horticulture, agronomy, landscape design, landscape contracting, or nursery management. Courses may include horticulture, agronomy, agricultural engineering, botany, entomology, and plant pathology. Business subjects such as accounting, personnel management, and sales and marketing will prove useful to those who hope to run their own business or advance to management positions.

Part-time or summer vacation work at a nursery, golf course, botanical garden, lawn care company, greenhouse, or landscape firm is a good way to learn about this field. Most landscapers and grounds workers receive on-the-job training from landscape contractors, managers, or other horticultural specialists.

Licensing, Certification, and Professional Societies

Most states require landscapers or grounds managers who use pesticides to be certified. Requirements vary, but they usually include the passing of a test on the correct and safe use of insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides. Landscape workers must also obey the rulings of agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency. Landscape contractors are required to have a state pesticide license and a local business license.

Several groups represent the interests of workers in landscaping and grounds management. Most work to advance the profession through educational and networking opportunities. Among them is the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS). It offers certification for grounds managers (CGM) and grounds keepers (CGK) who meet specific standards and pass an examination. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) offers the Certified Turf Grass Professional (CTGP) and Certified Ornamental Landscape Professional (COLP) designations to those who meet established home-study education requirements and pass the examinations. The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) offers the designations Certified Landscape Professional and Certified Landscape Technician (interior or exterior), to those who meet

established education and experience standards, and pass an ALCA examination.

Personal Qualifications

People in landscaping and grounds management must have an interest in making plants grow and an enthusiasm for the outdoors. Landscape workers should not be allergic to sunlight or plants. People who react strongly to insect bites must take steps to protect themselves.

Workers should be able to follow written and spoken orders. They should be self-motivated, because many of these workers have little supervision. Those who deal with the public should get along well with people. Grounds managers must be able to direct and instruct workers. Landscape contractors should have the ability to manage a business.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

Landscape workers work throughout the United States. They are more likely to work in large suburban regions. They are employed in cities active in urban renewal, in regions with a growing population, places interested in environmental quality and recreation, and in states to which industries are moving and building new plants.

In 2000, around 1.1 million workers held jobs in landscaping and grounds maintenance. Nearly half worked for companies which provide landscape and horticultural services. About 20 percent were self-employed. Many worked for amusement and recreation facilities such as sports stadiums, golf courses, country clubs, botanical gardens, and racetracks. Some were employed by retail nurseries and garden stores. Others worked for firms operating and building commercial, residential, and industrial real estate such as shopping centers, malls, and apartment and housing complexes. Some worked for local governments installing and maintaining landscaping for parks, schools, hospitals, and other public facilities. Around 15 percent worked part-time, of which, many were school age.

Employment Outlook

The employment outlook for landscapers and other grounds maintenance workers is good. In fact, employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2010. The interest in ecology and environmental quality has created a demand for landscaping and natural settings. Increased leisure and interest in physical fitness have brought large numbers of people to parks, golf courses, and other recreational sites. In addition, construction of commercial, industrial, and residential buildings will

contribute to the demand for these workers. Developers, real estate agents, and homeowners will continue trying to increase property value and attract prospective buyers by making the landscape inside and outside of their properties more attractive.

Many openings will also come from the need to replace workers who leave this occupation. The work is physically demanding and the pay for beginners is often low which contributes to a high job turnover rate. This is why landscaping relies heavily on young workers who take jobs in landscape work to earn money for school, or who take these jobs until they find a better paying job. Full-time employment opportunities will be best for those with some college as well as on-the-job training. It is also important to note that employment opportunities, especially for nonseasonal work, are more numerous in regions with temperate climates where landscapers and grounds managers can work all year.

Entry Methods

High school students can get experience while still in school. They can mow lawns and offer other grounds management services. They may get a part-time job with a landscape contractor, a lawn care company, a golf course, or a nursery. Some may get summer work at a state park. This kind of work is a useful way to gain the experience and references necessary for entry into the landscaping field.

High school graduates can apply for full-time jobs as laborers or trainees with landscape contractors, nursery owners, or lawn care companies. Graduates of a two-year technical school or college may find jobs or apprenticeship opportunities through the school placement office. They may get help or information from local employment offices, property managers, building contractors, urban development offices, and park commissions. Professional organizations and many companies have web sites which list employment opportunities.

Advancement

An associate or bachelor's degree, along with experience, offers the best assurance of advancement. Landscapers with experience and the right skills may become work crew chiefs. Prospects are best with large contracting firms or with large institutions with many employees. Crew chiefs may become assistants to grounds managers or landscape contractors. Assistants may become grounds managers.

Many of these workers become landscape contractors. Others may start a business such as a lawn service company. Some may become sales representatives for firms that sell equipment and supplies to landscapers, grounds managers, or lawn care companies.

For Further Research

Associated Landscape Contractors of America, 150 Elden Street, Suite 270, Herndon, VA 20170. Web Site: www.alca.org

Professional Grounds Management Society, 720 Light Street, Baltimore, MD 21230. Web Site: www.pgms.org

Professional Lawn Care Association of America, 1000 Johnson Ferry Road, N.E., Suite C-135, Marietta, GA 30068-2112. Web Site: www.plcaa.org.

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