
Grounds Maintenance Workers

(O*NET 37-1012.00, 37-3011.00, 37-3012.00, 37-3013.00, 37-3019.99)

Significant Points

- Opportunities should be very good, especially for workers willing to work seasonal or variable schedules, because of significant job turnover and increased demand for landscaping.
- Many beginning jobs have low earnings and are physically demanding.
- Most workers learn through short-term on-the-job training.

Nature of the Work

Attractively designed, healthy, and well-maintained lawns, gardens, and grounds create a positive impression, establish a peaceful mood, and increase property values. Grounds maintenance workers perform the variety of tasks necessary to achieve a pleasant and functional outdoor environment. They also care for indoor gardens and plantings in commercial and public facilities, such as malls, hotels, and botanical gardens.

These workers use handtools such as shovels, rakes, pruning and handsaws, hedge and brush trimmers, and axes, as well as power lawnmowers, chain saws, snowblowers, and electric clippers. Some use equipment such as tractors and twin-axle vehicles. Landscaping and groundskeeping workers at parks, schools, cemeteries, and golf courses may lay sod after preparing the ground. Workers at sod farms use sod cutters to harvest sod that will be replanted elsewhere.

Grounds maintenance workers can be divided into landscaping workers and groundskeeping workers, depending on whether they mainly install new landscape elements or maintain existing ones, but their duties often overlap. Other grounds maintenance workers are pesticide handlers and tree trimmers.

Landscaping workers install plants and other elements into landscaped areas and often maintain them. They might mow, edge, trim, fertilize, dethatch, water, and mulch lawns and grounds many times during the growing season. They grade property by creating or smoothing hills and inclines, install lighting or sprinkler systems, and build walkways, terraces, patios, decks, and fountains. They also transport and plant new vegetation, and transplant, mulch, fertilize, and water existing plants, trees, and shrubs. A growing number of residential and commercial clients, such as managers of office buildings, shopping malls, multiunit residential buildings, and hotels and motels, favor full-service landscape maintenance.

Groundskeeping workers, also called *groundskeepers*, usually focus on maintaining existing grounds. They might work on athletic fields, golf courses, cemeteries, university campuses, and parks. In addition to caring for sod, plants, and trees, they rake and mulch leaves, clear snow from walkways and parking lots, and use irrigation methods to adjust the amount of water consumption and prevent waste. They see to the proper upkeep and repair of sidewalks, parking lots, groundskeeping equipment, pools, fountains, fences, planters, and benches.

Groundskeeping workers who care for athletic fields keep natural and artificial turf in top condition, mark out boundaries, and paint turf with team logos and names before events. They must make sure that the underlying soil on fields with natural turf has the required composition to allow proper drainage and to support the grasses used on the field. Groundskeeping workers mow, water, fertilize, and aerate the fields regularly. In sports venues, they vacuum and disinfect synthetic turf after its use to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria, and they remove the turf and replace the cushioning pad periodically.

Groundskeepers in parks and recreation facilities care for lawns, trees, and shrubs; maintain playgrounds; clean buildings; and keep parking lots, picnic areas, and other public spaces free of litter. They also may erect and dismantle snow fences, and maintain swimming pools. These workers inspect buildings and equipment, make needed repairs, and keep everything freshly painted.

Workers who maintain golf courses are called greenskeepers. Greenskeepers do many of the same things as other groundskeepers, but they also periodically relocate the holes on putting greens to prevent uneven wear of the turf and to add interest and challenge to the game. Greenskeepers also keep canopies, benches, ball washers, and tee markers repaired and freshly painted.

Some groundskeepers specialize in caring for cemeteries and memorial gardens. They dig graves to specified depths, generally using a backhoe. They mow grass regularly, apply fertilizers and other chemicals, prune shrubs and trees, plant flowers, and remove debris from graves.

Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, *vegetation* mix herbicides, fungicides, or insecticides and apply them through sprays, dusts, or vapors into the soil or onto plants. Those working for chemical lawn service firms are more specialized, inspecting lawns for problems and applying fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals to stimulate growth and prevent or control weeds, diseases, or insect infestation. Many practice integrated pest-management techniques.

Tree trimmers and *pruners* cut away dead or excess branches from trees or shrubs to clear roads, sidewalks, or utilities' equipment or to improve the appearance, health, and value of trees. Some of these workers also specialize in pruning, trimming and shaping ornamental trees and shrubs for private residences, golf courses, or other institutional grounds. Tree trimmers and pruners use handsaws, pole saws, shears, and clippers. When



Grounds maintenance workers often use power equipment.

trimming near power lines, they usually work on truck-mounted lifts and use power pruners.

Supervisors of landscaping and groundskeeping workers oversee grounds maintenance work. They prepare cost estimates, schedule work for crews on the basis of weather conditions or the availability of equipment, perform spot checks to ensure the quality of the service, and suggest changes in work procedures. In addition, supervisors train workers in their tasks; keep employees' time records and record work performed; and even assist workers when deadlines are near. Supervisors who own their own business are also known as *landscape contractors*. They also often call themselves *landscape designers* if they create landscape design plans. Landscape designers also design exterior floral displays by planting annual or perennial flowers. Some work with landscape architects. (Landscape architects, discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*, create more technical architectural plans and usually work on larger projects.) Supervisors of workers on golf courses are known as superintendents.

Supervisors of tree trimmers and pruners are called *arborists*. Arborists specialize in the care of individual trees, diagnosing and treating tree diseases and recommending preventative health measures. Some arborists plant trees. Most can recommend types of trees that are appropriate for a specific location, as the wrong tree in the wrong location could lead to future problems with crowding, insects, diseases, or poor growth.

Arborists are employed by cities to improve urban green space, utilities to maintain power distribution networks, companies to care for residential and commercial properties, as well as many other settings.

Work environment. Many grounds maintenance jobs are seasonal, available mainly in the spring, summer, and fall, when most planting, mowing, trimming, and cleanup are necessary. Most of the work is performed outdoors in all kinds of weather. It can be physically demanding and repetitive, involving much bending, lifting, and shoveling. Workers in landscaping and groundskeeping may be under pressure to get the job completed, especially when they are preparing for scheduled events such as athletic competitions.

Those who work with pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemicals, as well as dangerous equipment and tools such as power lawnmowers, chain saws, and power clippers, must exercise safety precautions. Workers who use motorized equipment must take care to protect their hearing.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most grounds maintenance workers learn on-the-job. However, some occupations may require formal training in areas such as landscape design, horticulture, or business management.

Education and training. There usually are no minimum educational requirements for entry-level positions in grounds maintenance. In 2006, most workers had a high school education or less. Short-term on-the-job training generally is sufficient to teach new hires how to operate and repair equipment such as mowers, trimmers, leaf blowers, and small tractors and to follow correct safety procedures. They must also learn proper planting and maintenance procedures for their localities. Large institutional employers such as golf courses or municipalities may supplement on-the-job training with coursework in sub-

jects like horticulture or small engine repair for those employees showing ability and willingness to learn.

Landscaping supervisors or contractors who own their own business, arborists, and landscape designers usually need formal training in landscape design, horticulture, arboriculture, or business. A bachelor's degree may be needed for those who want to become specialists or own their own business.

Licensure. Most States require licensure or certification for workers who apply pesticides. Requirements vary but usually include passing a test on the proper use and disposal of insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides. Some States require that landscape contractors be licensed.

Other qualifications. Employers look for responsible, self-motivated individuals because grounds maintenance workers often work with little supervision. Employers want people who can learn quickly and follow instructions accurately so that time is not wasted and plants are not damaged. Workers who deal directly with customers must get along well with people.

Driving a vehicle is often needed for these jobs. If driving is required, preference is given to applicants with a driver's license, a good driving record, and experience driving a truck.

Certification and advancement. The Professional Grounds Management Society offers voluntary certification to grounds managers who have a bachelor's degree in a relevant major with at least 4 years of experience, including 2 years as a supervisor; an associate degree in a relevant major with 6 years of experience, including 3 years as a supervisor; or 8 years of experience including 4 years as a supervisor, and no degree. Additionally, candidates for certification must pass an examination covering subjects such as equipment management, personnel management, environmental issues, turf care, ornamentals, and circulatory systems. Certification as a grounds technician is also offered by this organization.

The Professional Landcare Network offers six certifications to those who seek to demonstrate specific knowledge in an area of landscaping and grounds maintenance. Obtaining certification may be an asset for career advancement. The Tree Care Industry Association offers four levels of credentials. Currently available credentials include Tree Care Apprentice, Ground Operations Specialist, Tree Climber Specialist, and Tree Care Specialist, as well as a certification program in safety.

Laborers who demonstrate a willingness to work hard and quickly, have good communication skills, and take an interest in the business may advance to crew leader or other supervisory positions. Becoming a grounds manager or landscape contractor usually requires some formal education beyond high school and several years of progressively more responsible experience. Some workers with groundskeeping backgrounds may start their own businesses after several years of experience.

Employment

Grounds maintenance workers held about 1.5 million jobs in 2006. Employment was distributed as follows:

Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	1,220,000
First-line supervisors/managers of landscaping, lawn service, and groundskeeping workers	202,000
Tree trimmers and pruners	41,000
Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation	31,000
Grounds maintenance workers, all other.....	28,000

More than one-third of the workers in grounds maintenance were employed in companies providing landscaping services to buildings and dwellings. Others worked for amusement and recreation facilities, such as golf courses and racetracks; educational institutions, both public, and private; and property management and real-estate development firms. Some were employed by local governments, installing and maintaining landscaping for parks, hospitals, and other public facilities. Almost 24 percent of grounds maintenance workers were self-employed, providing landscape maintenance directly to customers on a contract basis.

About 14 percent of grounds maintenance workers worked part time; about 9 percent were younger than age twenty.

Job Outlook

Those interested in grounds maintenance occupations should find very good job opportunities in the future. Employment of grounds maintenance workers is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations through the year 2016.

Employment change. Employment of grounds maintenance workers is expected to grow about 18 percent during the 2006-16 decade. Grounds maintenance workers will have among the largest numbers of new jobs arise, around 270,000 over the 2006-16 period.

More workers will be needed to keep up with increasing demand by lawn care and landscaping companies. Increased construction of office buildings, shopping malls, and residential housing and of highways and parks is expected to increase demand for grounds maintenance workers. In addition, the upkeep and renovation of existing landscaping and grounds are continuing sources of demand for grounds maintenance workers. Major institutions, such as universities and corporate headquarters, recognize the importance of good landscape design in attracting personnel and clients and are expected to use grounds maintenance services more extensively to maintain and upgrade their properties. Grounds maintenance workers working for State and local governments, however, may face budget cuts, which may affect hiring.

Homeowners are a growing source of demand for grounds maintenance workers. Many two-income households lack the time to take care of their lawns so they increasingly hire people to maintain them. Also, as the population ages, more elderly homeowners will require lawn care services to help maintain their

yards. In addition, there is a growing interest by homeowners in their backyards and a desire to make yards more attractive for outdoor entertaining. With many newer homes having more and bigger windows overlooking the property, it is becoming more important to maintain and beautify the grounds.

Job opportunities for tree trimmers and pruners should also increase as utility companies step up pruning of trees around electric lines to prevent power outages. Additionally, tree trimmers and pruners will be needed to help combat infestations caused by new species of insects from other countries. For example, ash trees from Chicago to Washington, D.C. are under threat by a pest from China, and preventative eradication may be employed to control the pest.

Job prospects. Jobs for grounds maintenance workers are increasing, and because wages for beginners are low and the work is physically demanding, many employers have difficulty attracting enough workers to fill all openings, creating very good job opportunities.

Job opportunities for nonseasonal work are more numerous in regions with temperate climates, where landscaping and lawn services are required all year. Opportunities may vary with local economic conditions.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings in May 2006 of grounds maintenance workers were as follows:

First-line supervisors/managers of landscaping, lawn service, and groundskeeping workers	\$17.93
Tree trimmers and pruners	13.58
Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation	12.84
Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	10.22
Grounds maintenance workers, all others	9.82

Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of landscaping and groundskeeping workers were as follows:

Local government	\$11.64
Services to buildings and dwellings.....	10.17
Landscaping services	10.17
Other amusement and recreation industries	9.47
Employment services	9.09

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Grounds maintenance workers and related first-line supervisors/managers	—	1,521,000	1,791,000	270,000	18
First-line supervisors/managers of landscaping, lawn service, and groundskeeping workers	37-1012	202,000	237,000	36,000	18
Grounds maintenance workers.....	37-3000	1,319,000	1,554,000	235,000	18
Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	37-3011	1,220,000	1,441,000	221,000	18
Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation	37-3012	31,000	35,000	4,300	14
Tree trimmers and pruners	37-3013	41,000	45,000	4,500	11
Grounds maintenance workers, all other.....	37-3019	28,000	33,000	4,600	17

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Related Occupations

Grounds maintenance workers perform most of their work outdoors and have some knowledge of plants and soils. Others whose jobs may require that they work outdoors are agricultural workers; farmers, ranchers, and agricultural managers; forest, conservation, and logging workers; landscape architects; and biological scientists.

Sources of Additional Information

For career and certification information on tree trimmers and pruners, contact:

► Tree Care Industry Association, 3 Perimeter Rd., Unit I, Manchester, NH 03103-3341.

Internet: <http://www.treecareindustry.org>

► International Society of Arboriculture, P.O. Box 3129, Champaign, IL 61826-3129.

Internet:

<http://www.isa-arbor.com/careersInArboriculture/careers.aspx>

For information on work as a landscaping and groundskeeping worker, contact the following organizations:

► Professional Grounds Management Society, 720 Light St., Baltimore, MD 21230-3816. Internet: <http://www.pgms.org>

► Professional Landcare Network, 950 Herndon Parkway, Suite 450, Herndon, VA 20170-5528.

Internet: <http://www.landcarenetwork.org/>

For information on becoming a licensed pesticide applicator, contact your State's Department of Agriculture or Department of Environmental Protection or Conservation.