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## Grounds Maintenance Workers

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### Significant Points

- Opportunities should be excellent, especially for workers willing to work seasonal or variable schedules, due to significant job turnover and increasing demand by landscaping services companies.
- 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 first 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.

The duties of *landscaping workers* and *groundskeeping workers* are similar and often overlap. Landscaping workers physically install and maintain landscaped areas. They grade property, install lighting or sprinkler systems, and build walkways, terraces, patios, decks, and fountains. In addition to initially transporting and planting new vegetation, they transplant, mulch, fertilize, and water flowering plants, trees, and shrubs and mow and water lawns. 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. Landscaping workers perform a range of duties, including mowing, edging, trimming, fertilizing, dethatching, and mulching, for such clients on a regular basis during the growing season.

*Groundskeeping workers*, also called *groundskeepers*, maintain a variety of facilities, including 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 those with natural and those with artificial turf in top condition and 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. They also vacuum and disinfect synthetic turf after its use, in order to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria, and they remove the turf and replace the cushioning pad periodically.

Workers who maintain golf courses are called *greenskeepers*. Greenskeepers do many of the same things that other groundskeepers do. In addition, greenskeepers periodically re-



*Grounds maintenance workers use a variety of equipment to maintain lawns, athletic fields, and other landscaped areas.*

locate the holes on putting greens to eliminate 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 groundskeeping workers 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.

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

*Supervisors of landscaping and groundskeeping workers* perform various functions. 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.

Landscaping and groundskeeping workers use handtools such as shovels, rakes, pruning and regular saws, 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 use sod cutters to harvest sod that will be replanted elsewhere.

*Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation,* mix or apply pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, or insecticides through sprays, dusts, vapors, incorporation into the soil, or application of chemicals onto trees, shrubs, lawns, or botanical crops. Those working for chemical lawn service firms are more specialized, inspecting lawns for problems and applying fertilizers, herbicides, 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 either to maintain rights-of-way for roads, sidewalks, or utilities or to improve the appearance, health, and value of trees. Tree trimmers also may fill cavities in trees to promote healing and prevent deterioration. Workers who specialize in pruning trim and shape ornamental trees and shrubs for private residences, golf courses, or other institutional grounds. Tree trimmers and pruners use handsaws, pruning hooks, shears, and clippers. When trimming near power lines, they usually use truck-mounted lifts and power pruners.

**Working Conditions**

Many of the jobs for grounds maintenance workers are seasonal, meaning that they are in demand mainly in the spring, summer, and fall, when most planting, mowing, trimming, and cleanup are necessary. The work, most of which is performed outdoors in all kinds of weather, 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 themselves against hearing damage.

**Employment**

Grounds maintenance workers held about 1.3 million jobs in 2002. Employment was distributed as follows:

Landscaping and groundskeeping workers .....	1,074,000
First-line supervisors/managers of landscaping, lawn service, and groundskeeping workers .....	150,000
Tree trimmers and pruners .....	59,000
Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation .....	27,000

About one-third of the workers in grounds maintenance were employed in companies providing landscaping services to buildings and dwellings. Others worked for property management and real-estate development firms, lawn and garden equipment and supply stores, and amusement and recreation facilities, such as golf courses and racetracks. Some were employed by local governments, installing and maintaining landscaping for parks, schools, hospitals, and other public facilities.

Almost 1 out of every 4 grounds maintenance workers was self-employed, providing landscape maintenance directly to

customers on a contract basis. About 1 of every 6 worked part time; about a tenth were of school age.

**Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

There usually are no minimum educational requirements for entry-level positions in grounds maintenance, although a diploma is necessary for some jobs. In 2002, 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 equipment such as mowers, trimmers, leaf blowers, and small tractors and to follow correct safety procedures. Entry-level workers must be able to follow directions and learn proper planting procedures. If driving is an essential part of a job, employers look for applicants with a good driving record and some experience driving a truck. Employers also look for responsible, self-motivated individuals because grounds maintenance workers often work with little supervision. Workers who deal directly with customers must get along well with people.

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. Advancement or entry into positions such as grounds manager and landscape contractor usually requires some formal education beyond high school and several years of progressively more responsible experience.

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

The Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) offers certification to grounds managers who have a combination of 8 years of experience and formal education beyond high school and who pass an examination covering subjects such as equipment management, personnel management, environmental issues, turf care, ornamentals, and circulatory systems. The PGMS also offers certification to groundskeepers who have a high school diploma or equivalent, plus 2 years of experience in the grounds maintenance field.

The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) offers the designations “Certified Landscape Professional (Exterior and Interior)” and “Certified Landscape Technician (Exterior or Interior)” to those who meet established education and experience standards and who pass a specific examination. The hands-on test for technicians covers areas such as the operation of maintenance equipment and the installation of plants by reading a plan. A written safety test also is administered. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) offers the designations “Certified Turfgrass Professional” (CTP) and “Certified Ornamental Landscape Professional” (COLP), which require written exams.

Some workers with groundskeeping backgrounds may start their own businesses after several years of experience.

**Job Outlook**

Those interested in grounds maintenance occupations should find plentiful job opportunities in the future. Demand for their services is growing, 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 favorable job opportunities. High turnover will generate a large number of job openings to replace workers who leave the occupation.

More workers also will be needed to keep up with increasing demand by lawn care and landscaping companies. Employment of grounds maintenance workers is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2012. Expected growth in the construction of all types of buildings requiring lawn care and maintenance, from office buildings to shopping malls and residential housing, plus more highways and parks, will contribute to 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. Owners of many buildings and facilities recognize the importance of “curb appeal” in attracting business and maintaining the value of the property and are expected to use grounds maintenance services more extensively to maintain and upgrade their properties.

Homeowners are a growing source of demand for grounds maintenance workers. Because many two-income households lack the time to take care of the lawn, they are increasingly hiring people to maintain it for them. They also know that a nice yard will increase the property’s value. In addition, there is a growing interest by homeowners in their backyards, as well as a desire to make the yards more attractive for outdoor entertaining. With many newer homes having more and bigger windows overlooking the yard, it becomes more important to maintain and beautify the grounds. Also, as the population ages, more elderly homeowners will require lawn care services to help maintain their yards.

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

### Earnings

Median hourly earnings in 2002 of grounds maintenance workers were as follows:

First-line supervisors/managers of landscaping, lawn service, and groundskeeping workers .....	\$15.89
Tree trimmers and pruners .....	12.07
Pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation .....	11.94
Landscaping and groundskeeping workers .....	9.51

Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of landscaping and groundskeeping workers in 2002 were as follows:

Elementary and secondary schools .....	\$13.36
Local government .....	11.81
Services to buildings and dwellings .....	9.38
Other amusement and recreation industries .....	8.92
Lessors of real estate .....	8.65
Employment services .....	8.05

### 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>

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

► Professional Lawn Care Association of America, 1000 Johnson Ferry Rd. NE., Suite C-135, Marietta, GA, 30068-2112. Internet: <http://www.plcaa.org>

► Associated Landscape Contractors of America, 150 Elden St., Suite 270, Herndon, VA, 20170. Internet: <http://www.alca.org>

For information on becoming a licensed pesticide applicator, contact your State’s Department of Agriculture or Department of Environmental Protection (or Conservation), most of which are accessible from the following Web site: <http://aapco.ceris.purdue.edu/doc/statedirs/offtbl.html>