

Hope is a Tree, Part 5, Appendix: Professionals Caring for the City's Trees

Landscapers, tree trimmers, nursery growers, landscape architects, arborists, and urban foresters each play a role in the development and maintenance of a city's treescape. But although there's a good deal of overlap among the professions, each has its own area of specialization, and it can be a significant mistake, both economically and from a health and safety standpoint, for a town to scrimp on expenses by employing a less qualified person for a task requiring a specific level of expertise.

A landscaper provides the labor and equipment for a new development or renovation project prepared by an arborist or urban forester while, as the name suggests, much of a tree trimmer's job entails pruning branches and taking down trees when needed. They may also assist in the planting and care of new trees.

Nursery growers produce and sell saplings and young trees, and typically offer transportation and planting of purchased trees as one of their services. They can be very helpful in providing advice on the best species and cultivars (varieties) for planting in a given set of environmental conditions. A problem for towns that would like to enhance the diversity of trees lining their streets is that many nurseries, unsurprisingly, primarily raise only the most popular species.

Landscape architects develop plans and specifications for the development of new sites or renovation of existing locations. Part of their recommendations usually include trees, but their interests typically lie in the appearance of a finished site rather than the living ecology of how selected species will fare in a given situation over the long run.

The professional arborist has extensive experience, typically via seminars and on the job training, that have enabled him or her to achieve certification by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). In addition to planting, care and removal of trees, they are trained in risk assessment, soil management, litigation issues, and project oversight.

In their work, they follow the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) guidelines for safe arboriculture practices (Z133.0) and for scientifically sound pruning (A300.0). The city's arborists also work with the regional urban forester in developing long-range plans for how the town's urban forest should look well into the future.

Urban foresters have attained at least a Bachelor's degree in Forestry with specialization in developing and maintaining a population of trees in an urban setting. While arborists primarily focus on the care of individual trees through planting, timely pruning, removal and replacement, an urban forester works on large scale ecosystem management issues.

In addition to a thorough knowledge of arboriculture practices, an urban forester's work requires a background in Social Science, as much of their day-to-day activities entail interacting with all manner of stakeholders in the care of a town's present population of trees and planning for its future treescape.

There is no one-size-fits-all profession for managing the hundreds to many thousands of trees comprising the living infrastructure of a city. The typical urban tree can be expected to live about as long as the average human resident of the town. Each individual of each species of tree develops its own personality over time, and the benefits it offers the community will reflect knowledgeable care from appropriate planting and planned maintenance to ultimate removal and replacement.

And the city's professional arborists are central to maintaining the quality of life afforded by a well-planned and efficiently maintained urban forest.