

Arborist interview questions

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What to expect

Arborist interviews typically combine practical and safety-focused questions with behavioural and client-facing scenarios. Employers want to know you can work safely at height, assess tree risk, and communicate with clients and councils.

- **Technical:** Questions about tree biology, pruning techniques, and equipment operation, often asking you to walk through a process.
- **Safety:** Questions that probe your understanding of hazard identification, work health and safety, and safe work method statements.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations involving client requests, protected trees, or unexpected site hazards.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for a specific past example, such as a time you identified a defect or dealt with a difficult client.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about how you explain technical advice, handle complaints, or provide quotes and recommendations.
- **Process:** Questions that ask you to describe the steps you take from receiving a job to completing it, including permits and clean-up.

The interview may start with a phone screen covering tickets and experience, then a face-to-face or site-based interview with a supervisor or lead arborist. You might be asked to walk through a tree assessment or demonstrate equipment knowledge. Some employers include a practical climbing or pruning test.

1. Walk me through how you assess the health and structural stability of a mature tree.

Why they ask

This tests your technical knowledge and your ability to identify defects that could lead to failure.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step walk-through: start with a visual inspection from the ground, note the tree's species, lean, and canopy. Then describe using binoculars or a camera pole to check for cavities, cracks, fungal brackets, and deadwood. Explain how you might use a sounding mallet or resistograph if needed, and how you decide on a risk rating and recommended action.

Example answer

"I start by looking at the whole tree from a distance, checking for lean, root plate movement, and any obvious deadwood. Then I move closer to inspect the trunk for wounds, cracks, or fungal growth, and I use binoculars to check the crown for dieback or broken limbs. If I see something suspicious, I might use a sounding mallet to listen for hollow areas. I also consider the site: targets like houses or footpaths, and soil conditions. Finally, I assign a risk rating and recommend pruning, monitoring, or removal."

2. Describe your process for setting up a safe work zone before a tree removal near a building or powerline.

Why they ask

Safety is the top priority in arboriculture, and this question checks you know how to control hazards before starting work.

How to structure your answer

List the steps in order: assess the site, identify hazards including powerlines, traffic, and pedestrians, then establish controls. Mention exclusion zones, traffic management, and communication with the crew and client. Finish by explaining how you monitor the zone during the job.

Example answer

"First I do a site assessment and look for hazards like powerlines, nearby buildings, and pedestrian traffic. I check the location of underground services if needed. Then I set up an exclusion zone with cones and tape, and if traffic is affected I arrange traffic control. I make sure the crew knows the plan, including escape routes, and I confirm the client and public are kept clear. I also check the weather and the tree's condition before any cuts are made. Throughout the job I keep watching for changes and adjust the zone as needed."

3. Tell me about a time you identified a serious tree defect that others had missed.

Why they ask

This behavioural question looks for your observation skills, initiative, and ability to communicate risk.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task, the action you took, and the result. Focus on what you noticed, how you confirmed it, and what you did next.

Example answer

"During a routine pruning job at a school, I noticed a large gum tree had a subtle bulge near the base and fungal brackets growing from a root. The crew had walked past it, but I flagged it immediately. I stopped work, took photos, and used a mallet to confirm a hollow. I reported it to the supervisor and the school, and we arranged a resistograph test. The tree was found to have significant internal decay and was removed during the school holidays, avoiding a potential failure in a playground."

4. You arrive on site and the client wants you to remove a tree that you think is protected by a council regulation. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario tests your judgement, your knowledge of regulations, and how you handle client pressure.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: stay calm, explain your concern, and outline the proper process. Show you would not proceed without checking, and describe how you would verify the tree's status and communicate with the client and council.

Example answer

"I would thank the client for the job but explain that I need to check whether the tree is protected before any work starts. I would ask for the property address and look up the local council's tree preservation order or significant tree register. If it is protected, I would explain that a permit is required and offer to help with the application. I would not remove the tree without approval, even if the client insists, because that could lead to fines and damage my reputation. I would document everything and follow up with the council."

5. How do you explain to a client why a tree needs to be pruned in a particular way?

Why they ask

This client-facing question assesses your communication skills and your ability to educate without jargon.

How to structure your answer

Explain using plain language: relate the pruning to tree biology, safety, and the client's goals. Describe how you would check the client's understanding and handle any disagreement.

Example answer

"I start by asking what they want from the tree, like more light or safety. Then I explain that pruning cuts need to be made at the branch collar so the tree can seal the wound, and that removing too much can stress it. I might use a simple analogy, like a person needing surgery. I point out the specific branches and show them where the cuts will be. I check they are comfortable and answer questions. If they want something different, I explain the risks and offer alternatives."

6. What steps do you take from receiving a job to completing a tree removal?

Why they ask

This process question checks your organisation, planning, and thoroughness.

How to structure your answer

Chronological walk-through: from initial call or job sheet, to site assessment, permits, equipment checks, safety setup, the removal itself, and final clean-up and client sign-off.

Example answer

"First I review the job details and check if any permits are needed. I confirm the site address and arrange a time. On site, I do a risk assessment and set up the work zone. I check my equipment, including chainsaw, ropes, and harness. I plan the removal, deciding on rigging or felling direction, and brief the crew. I complete the removal safely, then clear all debris, chip the branches, and tidy the site. Finally, I walk the site with the client to make sure they are happy and provide any follow-up advice."