

Gardener interview questions

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What to expect

Gardener interviews are practical and grounded. Employers want to know you can do the physical work safely, handle plants and tools correctly, and deal with clients or supervisors without drama. Expect a mix of walk-through questions on technique, questions about past situations, and a couple of on-the-spot scenarios.

- **Process:** Step-by-step questions on how you'd carry out a core task like soil prep, planting or pruning.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about how you've handled real situations before, such as a pest outbreak or a difficult client.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement, such as a client requesting something unsuitable for the site.
- **Safety:** Questions on handling power tools, chemicals and worksite hazards correctly.
- **Client-facing:** Questions on managing client expectations and resolving complaints on residential or commercial jobs.

Most gardener interviews start with a rundown of your experience and qualifications, move into a few technical or process questions to check practical knowledge, then a couple of scenario or behavioural questions to see how you handle real situations. Some employers, especially for maintenance contracts, will also ask about availability, transport and physical fitness before wrapping up with your questions for them.

1. Walk me through how you'd prepare a garden bed for new plantings.

Why they ask

This checks whether you understand the practical sequence of soil preparation and planting, which is core to the role.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step walkthrough: describe each stage in order from site assessment through to final watering, noting why each step matters.

Example answer

"I'd start by checking the soil condition, sometimes with a soil testing kit if I'm unsure about drainage or pH. Then I'd clear existing weeds and debris, turn over the soil with a rotary hoe or by hand depending on the bed size, and work in compost or fertiliser suited to the plants going in. Once the bed's ready I'd position plants according to the landscape plan, taking spacing and mature size into account, then plant, backfill and water in thoroughly. I'd finish with mulch to help retain moisture and suppress weeds."

2. Tell me about a time you dealt with a pest or disease problem in a garden you were maintaining.

Why they ask

Pest and disease inspection is a listed task, and employers want evidence you can spot problems early and act on them.

How to structure your answer

STAR: set the situation, explain your task, describe the action you took, and finish with the result.

Example answer

"On a regular maintenance round I noticed a client's roses had curled, discoloured leaves that hadn't been there the previous visit. My task was to work out the cause and fix it without damaging the surrounding plantings. I inspected the leaves closely, identified aphid activity, and applied a targeted treatment rather than a broad spray to avoid harming beneficial insects nearby. I also adjusted watering slightly since overwatering can attract pests. Over the following visits the plants recovered and there was no repeat outbreak that season."

3. A client asks you to plant something that isn't suited to the site's soil or climate. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests judgement and whether you'll push back constructively rather than just doing what's asked or causing conflict.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: explain how you'd assess the risk, what you'd say to the client, and how you'd land on a resolution.

Example answer

"I'd explain plainly why the plant is likely to struggle, for example if the soil's too heavy or the site gets too much afternoon sun for that species. I wouldn't just refuse outright, since it's their garden, but I'd offer a couple of alternatives that would give them a similar look with a much better chance of survival. If they still wanted to go ahead after hearing the risks, I'd plant it as asked but make a note that it was against advice, so there's no confusion later if it doesn't thrive."

4. How do you manage safety when operating chainsaws or other power tools on site?

Why they ask

Worksite safety management is a specialist skill area, and power tool use carries real injury risk, so employers need to know you take it seriously.

How to structure your answer

Safety protocol walkthrough: cover pre-use checks, PPE, site awareness and what you'd do if something went wrong.

Example answer

"Before starting I check the tool for damage or fuel issues and make sure I've got the right PPE on, including hearing and eye protection and gloves. I clear the immediate work area of people and obstacles, and if I'm working near a road or public path I'll set up barriers or signage. I keep both hands on the tool as trained and never work above shoulder height with a chainsaw without proper support. If a tool isn't behaving right I stop and report it rather than pushing through, since a small fault can turn into a serious injury fast."

5. A client is unhappy with a pruning job you completed. How would you respond?

Why they ask

Customer service is a listed general skill, and pruning complaints are common in this trade, so employers want to see you can handle feedback without getting defensive.

How to structure your answer

Customer service resolution: acknowledge the concern, explain your reasoning, and outline how you'd fix or follow up.

Example answer

"I'd listen to what specifically they're unhappy with rather than assuming, since sometimes it's a shape they didn't expect and other times it's a genuine mistake. I'd explain the reasoning behind the pruning,

for example if I cut back hard to encourage healthier growth, and show them how the plant is likely to look once it recovers. If I had actually got it wrong, I'd acknowledge that directly and talk through what I could do to correct it, whether that's shaping further or just monitoring regrowth over the coming visits."

6. What do you look for when inspecting plants for pests or disease?

Why they ask

This is a core listed task and tests your technical knowledge of plant health beyond just routine watering and pruning.

How to structure your answer

Technical checklist: list the specific signs you check for and how you'd decide on next steps.

Example answer

"I look at leaf colour and texture first, checking for yellowing, spotting, curling or holes. I check the undersides of leaves and stems for insects like aphids or scale, and I look at the soil surface and base of the plant for signs of fungal issues or rot. I also compare growth against what's normal for that species and season, since slow or stunted growth can point to a soil or watering issue rather than pests. Depending on what I find, I'll either apply a targeted treatment, adjust watering or fertiliser, or flag it for a more thorough assessment if it's something I haven't seen before."