

Urban Forester

Job Description

An urban forester, closely related to arborist, focuses on managing trees in an urban environment. This could range from analyzing tree canopy growth to overseeing the planting and protection of new trees. Urban foresters help ensure that trees in cities are available and healthy for recreational, environmental, and economic community purposes.

Salary

Entry — \$64,110
Middle — \$94,767
Top — \$111,491

Core Tasks

- Devise plans and policies for protecting urban tree canopies in both the long term and short term
- Work in a city to educate and advise community members on trees
- Oversee and participate in hands-on urban forestry projects
- Learn about local trees and communicate findings to key stakeholders
- Strategize how trees can coexist with existing natural, social, and economic systems in a community

Workplace / Environment

- **Work hours**
Approx. 40-60 hours/week
(At key milestones overtime work may be required to meet deadlines)
- **Environment**
Primarily in an **office space**, with occasional visits to tree sites and **community education** events
- **Travel**
Infrequent travel outside of focus region

Education / Prerequisites

Education Level

Bachelor's degree in fields relating to arboriculture, forestry, or environmental science and a minimum of 3 years experience

Licensing

At least 1 or 2 certifications usually required, depending on region

Pre-Job Preparation

Field experience, along with thorough knowledge of trees and how specific species function in an urban environment

Experience

Soft Skills

- Multitasking
- Balancing stakeholders' interests
- Professional writing

Technical Skills

- Government policy
- Word processing and database software
- Knowledge of trees



Career Path: Katie Hogan

About Me

Urban Forester / Environmental Program
Coordinator at City of Kirkland

Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies
from University of Washington

College Choices

"How I got to where I am now wasn't necessarily a straightforward route, which is common in environmental careers. I got a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Washington in **Environmental Studies**, but I certainly took a little bit of time after college to work in the field. I **wasn't quite ready for a desk job.**"



In the Field



"I decided to get a lot of **seasonal work** with different government agencies and to intimately get to know trees — really understand forest ecosystems and be out there every day looking at trees. So, I worked with the **U.S. Forest Service**, as well as Oregon State University and Utah State University, **traveling** around and doing **research**. I studied in Utah, California, Oregon, and Washington. That really helped me understand this baseline level of knowledge about **how ecosystems work** and what kills trees."

Focusing on Arboriculture

"After doing a lot of seasonal work, I decided to come back to the great PNW and I asked myself, 'Well, what can I do with **trees in an urban area?**' That's what propelled me into **arboriculture**. Arboriculture is kind of unique, in that you're **studying or manipulating individual trees**, individual tree species, and how those interact with built environments."

"Now I'm at Kirkland and mostly what I do is **managing the urban forest** — helping understand where we're at in terms of our tree canopy and what kind of policies and regulations we need to create to get to our goal, in terms of canopy coverage. I also help out a bit with other plans, like **sustainability master plans** and the **surface water master plan**. Arboriculture and urban forestry are really great ways to be in an urban environment and still be able to study and work around trees. A lot of people choose to live in an area, to put their roots down in the area, because of the beauty of the area and the greenery of the area. It's really **valuable to Kirkland** to have a green city so that people want to live here."

About My Job

"Arboriculture is a huge field and there's so much that you can do with it"

Pros

- "Arboriculture is a really **broad field**. An arborist could be people that are **climbing, pruning, or removing** trees. It could be **cultivating plants**, it could be **researching** plants, like [Bartlett](#). They have a really big research station on the East Coast. That's where a lot of the cutting-edge research in the arborist industry comes from."
- "You're figuring out how buildings, sidewalks, roads, and pollution and all these different things impact trees in an urban environment and what we do to **make conditions better for trees** in urban environments."

Cons

- "It's pretty well known that the government can be **strapped for resources**. We have really great programs here in Kirkland, but even so, there is still a lack in the ability to do a lot of public outreach. It is often just one staff person spearheading massive projects."
- "It is **hard to reach and engage the quieter voices** in the community. Those that do engage often have strong voices and opinions and may not always represent all resident's values from different socioeconomic backgrounds."

Fieldwork

- "Every few weeks, I'll need to go do some **site assessment**, or maybe I'll do a **tour of a park or a program** that the city is actively working on. When I am out of the office, it's getting updates on current city projects."
- "I don't have a lot of hard fieldwork in this new position. It's a transition for me because I've pretty much always had a pretty fieldwork-heavy position. There are plenty of **opportunities to do fieldwork** in arboriculture."

Office Work

- "I'm **generally in the office**. I'm on a **hybrid schedule**, working from home three days a week and in the office two days a week. I am generally sitting at a desk at City Hall in Kirkland."
- "It is mostly a desk job, working **40 hours a week**. When there's deadlines and meetings that can be upwards of 50-60 hours a week."

Skills

- "An important skill is **project management**. I would also say good **communication**, having some **leadership** skills, and then also just being really autonomous and **self-motivated**."
- "In this field, you're a **mediator** that can talk to the developers and talk to the environmental activists and people pushing for preservation. You meet in the middle and help figure out a solution."

Education/Experience

- "**Technical writing** is an important skill. **Public speaking** is a pretty big one as well."
- "Having, specifically for my position, an understanding in **ecology**, as well as knowing how to **read development plans**... knowing all that **lingo** and jargon related to development and construction."
- "For me, understanding **tree risk assessment** and **forest ecosystems** is necessary, which kind of ties into ecology."

The Future of **Urban Forestry**

"This field of study is definitely gaining
A lot of momentum nationwide"

"There are certainly some cities that have had an urban forester or city arborist for a long time, but [Tree City USA](#) did a study that showed that in the United States, less than 40% of cities have a structured urban forestry program. There's still a ton of **opportunity for growth** in this industry."

"This field of study is definitely gaining a lot of momentum nationwide because people are realizing, 'Wow, we're growing at this insanely rapid pace.' With that, we're getting a lot of trees cut down and just a lot of disruption and disturbance to our environment. The big question is, how can **growth and trees live harmoniously**? Arboriculture is a **huge field** and there's so much that you can do with it."