



FEATURE

Professor Ted Wilson, Silviculturist, and
Dr Rob Hawkins, Senior Education and Careers
Officer, Institute of Chartered Foresters

TOP 10 TIPS

TO KICK-START YOUR CAREER IN FORESTRY

Keen to build a successful career in forestry, forest conservation or arboriculture, but not sure how best to launch yourself? Here are our top tips to help you secure your desired first position and super-charge your career progression.

Embarking on a career as a forester or arboriculturist can be challenging. While the profession is dynamic and offers numerous exciting opportunities, identifying the right starting point is crucial. With increasing competition for the best positions, it is essential to take the right steps from the beginning.



1. Get on LinkedIn

Using social media effectively can significantly enhance your online profile, provide early notifications about new opportunities and enable global networking. If you do

not have a LinkedIn profile, create one. It can help you build contacts, promote yourself and develop a forestry-focused CV.

Join discussion groups on relevant topics to engage with other foresters and arborists – you'll learn a lot this way. Employers often check Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) postings during their recruitment process, so ensure appropriate privacy settings and post with caution.

With increasing competition for the best positions, it is essential to take the right steps from the beginning. Develop your knowledge, passion and distinctiveness by identifying and honing your unique selling points (USPs).

2. Demonstrate your knowledge with passion

Show a genuine interest in your chosen field. Be comfortable with the fundamental concepts of forestry and arboriculture and use technical terminology confidently. Impress prospective employers by attending events, volunteering, writing, giving talks and gaining work experience outside the classroom.

Engage in sports and hobbies, especially team activities, to develop additional skills valued in the workplace. Develop your knowledge, passion and distinctiveness by identifying and honing your unique selling points (USPs).

3. Know your trees and silviculture

Early career professionals with a good grasp of major native and non-native species, their silvical characteristics and associated pests and diseases have an advantage. This knowledge is useful for short contract and consultancy work, which can strengthen your CV and open doors to more permanent employment. If your university or college does not offer dedicated courses in these topics, train yourself with authoritative guidebooks, keep field records or attend courses and training events. There are also several excellent YouTube channels to subscribe to.

4. Never stop networking

This is crucial for boosting job opportunities, career progression and long-term development. Engage with professionals already working in your desired roles to gain real-world insights and meet potential employers. Attend or volunteer at professional workshops, symposia and conferences to demonstrate your enthusiasm.

Carry a business card (still useful!) and have a brief introduction ready to make a positive impression. It can be daunting to do this at first, but build your confidence by attending Early Career Professional events where students and those on the early steps of the career ladder can hone their skills.

5. Gain practical experience and technical qualifications

Build your CV by undertaking work experience, internships, voluntary work and gaining 'tickets'. A clean driving license is essential for forestry and arboriculture. Gain qualifications and experience in areas such as chainsaw operation, herbicide application, fence construction and tree planting. Industry-standard health and safety training and first aid certificates are highly valued. Choose courses prudently, focusing on quality rather than quantity.

6. Attend talks... and give your own

Enhance your knowledge by attending technical presentations, conferences and workshops. Engage with speakers and attendees, and consider giving your own talks at smaller conferences or local community groups. This will boost your confidence, hone your presentation skills and demonstrate your passion for communicating outside your peer group.

7. Write and travel

Writing and publishing articles about forestry or arboriculture can attract potential employers' attention. Consider writing for student publications, local newspapers, forestry magazines, blogs, online forums and social media. Travel to learn, gain new perspectives and create great forestry memories. Several forestry organisations support students in travelling for educational purposes, often in exchange for a short report for publication.

8. Be flexible and persevere

While having an ultimate career goal is important, be flexible and persistent when there is a gap between your ideal job and available opportunities. The right technical qualifications and skills will help you get your foot in the door. Perseverance and a positive attitude are essential for future progress.

9. Join a professional society

Join professional forestry or arboriculture organisations such as the Institute of Chartered Foresters, Arboricultural Association, Confor or one of the royal forestry societies. These organisations offer conferences, meetings, newsletters and e-newsletters that provide information about jobs, access to academic literature and career development opportunities.

10. Embrace life-long learning

All the previous nine points could, in many respects, be classed as aspects of life-long learning. While some jobs require additional professional training and qualifications – for example, consultancy work may need dedicated species licenses or professional qualifications – life-long learning is a key requirement in all professional practice.

Take advantage of training courses to develop your expertise and expand your competency. Keep a portfolio of relevant certificates and qualifications to demonstrate your commitment to continuing education. Some courses require a not insignificant financial commitment, though training funds are available – for example, the Institute has its Educational and Scientific Trust, Confor has the Forest Industries Education and Provident Fund, and in Scotland you can access the Future Foresters Fund and the Women in Forestry Fund too. Funds do tend to come and go as government departments' priorities change, so keep your eyes peeled for those opportunities.

Concluding thoughts

These top ten tips are tried and tested techniques that can be applied to almost any profession. The path to success can be summarised in three points: knowledge and technical competency, commitment and perseverance, and passion and engagement with your chosen discipline.

While the guidance given here will help you stand out in any recruitment process, success is not always immediate or easy. Seek constructive feedback, maintain a positive attitude in the face of adversity, and remember that things usually work out in the end. Finally, invest time and resources in career planning, but also have fun and enjoy the journey.



Useful links

ICF Job Board - charteredforesters.org/job-board
ICF Placements - charteredforesters.org/forestry-placements
Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund - confor.org.uk/resources/forest-industries-education-provident-fund/
Royal Forestry Society Careers - rfs.org.uk/careers
Royal Forestry Society Bursaries - rfs.org.uk/grants/bursaries/
Royal Scottish Forestry Society Education - rsfs.org.uk/index.php/education
Lantra Training - lantra.co.uk/training/forestry-arboriculture
Scottish Forestry Trust PhD and Masters Bursaries - scottishforestrytrust.org.uk/the-bursary-award-scheme