

ARBORICULTURE AS A PROFESSION

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The most commonly accepted traditional definition of Arboriculture is:

The selection, planting, care and management of trees, (including palms) woody shrubs and vines in the urban landscape.

(Richard Harris- Arboriculture, the integrated management of landscape trees, shrubs & vines.)

The role of the modern Arborist is expanding:

- Arborists are no longer just Technicians.
- We are innovators adjusting and developing practices to suit changing needs.
- Many arborists are also educators, if not professionally then in the work place with employees and clients.
- Many contribute to research or better understanding of tree culture through exchanges of ideas and observations at several levels of practice.
- Arboricultural technicians are also artists. The difference between "best practice" pruning and "technically correct" pruning, lies in the artistry of the work performed and the final appearance of the tree. Technically correct pruning can still produce an ugly tree, just as good work artistically is not necessarily technically correct. Quality tree maintenance practices are a combination of many skills honed over years of practice.
- Arborists must be environmentally aware. We work on a public perception threshold of environmental destruction. Well trained Arborists have a good understanding of the importance of trees in the landscape and strive to maintain their health and safety to the best of their ability. However, all trees have a beginning, a middle and an end and it up to us (the industry) to ensure this fundamental issue is understood by all people affected by our work.
- These days the majority of Arborists must also be good businessmen or women to succeed in the industry. Competition is strong in all facets of arboriculture. The demands on arboricultural businesses have never been greater and so being a good Arborist is not enough to guarantee success professionally.

.....Training needs.....

Thorough training of Arborists would ensure trainees develop a 'holistic' understanding of trees and how they interact with the surrounding environment, as well as the people affected by them and vice versa.

Arborists must have the right balance of underpinning knowledge and skills in a wide range of areas to be successful. These will include;

Soil/plant interactions

Soil/water relations

Tree biology, interaction with pests and diseases

Tree identification and plant selection skills

Tree structure & function,

Tree safety and hazard assessment

Tree protection and management on difficult sites

Report writing and data collection,

Safe work practices and employee and business management skills

Combined with the practical skills tree pruning & removal, planting & transplanting, rigging, & aerial rescue, etc.

Members of the **Arboricultural** profession study and work with tree issues daily. We have the experience, information and tree management skills needed by others who interact with trees, to assist in making that interaction successful.

All Arboricultural tasks fall into three fundamental categories:

Providing information:

to promote understanding and appreciation of the ecological complexity, physiology, importance and needs of trees in the urban landscape.

Converting that information into practical solutions:

There are vast array of problems which assail urban trees in many different circumstances from wet boggy sites to parched compacted urban deserts, from high rise developments to suburban backyards. Each situation must be assessed on an individual basis for the best course of action to achieve the desired result.

Implement those solutions:

The solutions to many tree management issues are often effected over long periods of time, are highly specialized, can be difficult or dangerous, and must always be done in a professional and safe manner.

The Arboricultural industry has been gaining momentum in recent times on the back of a **growing environmental awareness** and **greater accountability** of those responsible for tree management. The laws in South Australia have recently changed. Councils no longer have the protection of the local government act, and are liable for negligence where it occurs just as an ordinary citizen would be.

The introduction of the new Development Amendment Act 2000 has placed greater emphasis on the importance of trees in the landscape, by defining tree work as development and subjecting it to planning controls via local government. This change has already impacted strongly on our industry through tighter tree removal and pruning controls, as well as a host of other effects which combined have placed higher costs and lengthy delays on many of the industries activities. The need for additional training of industry members has been one of the most positive outcomes of this legislation.

There have been limited training opportunities here in South Australia, up until just recently.

In 1997 The International Society of Arboriculture-Aust Chapter formed. (ISA-Aust Chapter)

In the same year the South Australian Society of Arboriculture (SASA) formed:

Both of these Arboricultural organizations have played an important role in education, nationally and locally through their work with;

- The development and ongoing improvement of the National Training Competencies for Arboriculture,
- Behind the scenes work on education, professionalism, and safety in many different ways. i.e. Running seminars and conferences across the country on a wide range of topics, or Running Tree Climbing Championships, Arborcamps etc.
- Running accredited training courses in South Australia (SASA) through the use of registered training providers such as Arbortrim Training & Consultancy (Vic.)
- As well there are a few privately operated registered training providers in SA, as well as some TAFE Colleges, offering both short courses and traineeships to all levels of the competencies.

SASA Training

SASA has successfully run many short courses in the basics of Arboriculture and is currently working on a fully structured arboricultural course to level 4 of the competencies, to be offered early next year.

It is hoped this course will fill the void in training here in SA for a cohesive approach to the training of Arborists.

Run in two streams, one aimed at contractors and the other at council employees, the success of this course will depend upon financial assistance through training subsidies and solid commitment from prospective students.

Another exciting prospect for the future: The ISA Certification program

Certification guarantees a minimum level of knowledge through exams run by the certification committee across all areas of Arboriculture.

As well, there are stringent requirements for ongoing improvement of that knowledge to retain certification currency through a points system. This ensures participants in the program are continually having their arboricultural knowledge expanded and improved, unlike present educational systems. There are currently over 10,000 certified Arborists worldwide.

In conclusion:

With new educational developments and particularly with improved training opportunities, I believe Arborists are now even better placed to deal with urban tree management issues, and that the time of Arboriculture, as a valued and respected profession in this country, is only just beginning!