

Nursery Hand interview questions

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What to expect

Nursery Hand interviews are usually practical and grounded in the daily work. Employers want to know you can handle repetition, follow hygiene and safety rules, and spot a plant problem before it spreads.

- **Practical and process:** Questions about potting, propagation, watering and order picking, often with a walk-through of how you do a task.
- **Plant care and technical:** Questions about pests, diseases, nutrient problems, irrigation and propagation methods.
- **Safety and hygiene:** Questions about WHS, manual handling, chemical safety, biosecurity and nursery hygiene.
- **Behavioural and reliability:** Questions about past work, teamwork, attendance, stamina and dealing with repetitive tasks.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Questions about what you would do if equipment failed, stock looked wrong or a docket was unclear.

A typical interview starts with a short phone or in-person chat with the nursery supervisor, then moves to a site walk through the propagation area, growing benches and dispatch. You may be asked to demonstrate a task such as potting or taking a cutting, and there is often a trial shift or a second conversation before an offer. Questions usually mix practical plant knowledge with safety and reliability.

1. Walk me through how you would pot a batch of tube stock from smaller containers into the next size up.

Why they ask

This is a core daily task and the interviewer can see whether you work cleanly, keep stock labelled and understand root health.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: preparation, hygiene, root check, potting, labelling, watering in, bench placement.

Example answer

"I would start by checking the bench space and having the right size pots, fresh mix and labels ready. I would clean the bench and my tools before starting, then work through each plant by tapping it out, checking the roots for circling or rot, and teasing out any tight root ball. I would place the plant in the new pot at the same soil level, fill around it with mix and firm it gently so there are no air pockets. Each pot gets a label with the species and date, then I water it in and move it to the correct bench under the irrigation. I keep the batch together so the supervisor can check the run."

2. Tell me about a time you spotted a pest or disease problem in plants you were caring for. What did you do?

Why they ask

Pest and disease monitoring is a listed task, and early detection protects the whole crop.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Focus on what you saw, who you told and what changed.

Example answer

"At a previous nursery I was watering a bench of ornamental stock and noticed a sticky residue on the leaves and a few curled new shoots. I checked the undersides of the leaves and found aphids on several plants in one row. I isolated those pots, told the supervisor and recorded the bench number"

and plant type. We treated the affected rows and checked the neighbouring benches before the problem spread. The result was that we only lost a small number of plants instead of the whole batch, and the supervisor asked me to do a weekly pest check on that section."

3. What does good nursery hygiene look like in your work, and why does it matter?

Why they ask

Hygiene and biosecurity are central to keeping stock healthy.

How to structure your answer

Explain, give examples, link to biosecurity and stock health.

Example answer

"Good hygiene means cleaning tools and benches between batches, using clean pots and fresh mix, and not moving between propagation and growing zones without washing hands or changing gloves. It also means keeping weeds and fallen leaves out of the growing area and reporting any unusual plant symptoms straight away. It matters because pests and diseases travel easily on tools, hands and pots, and one dirty bench can affect a whole crop. I treat hygiene as part of the job, not an extra task."

4. You are watering a crop and notice the irrigation controller is not turning on at the set time. What do you do?

Why they ask

Irrigation controllers are a listed tool and this tests judgement under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: stop and assess, check simple causes, report, hand-water if needed, record.

Example answer

"First I would check the controller display for an error or a power issue, and look at the solenoid or tap to see if it is a simple blockage or a tripped switch. If I cannot fix it safely, I would tell the supervisor straight away and hand-water the most vulnerable benches so the plants do not dry out. I would note the time, the zone and what I saw so the supervisor or maintenance person can follow up. I would not leave the crop without water while waiting."

5. How do you keep track of stock and orders when several customer dockets are being picked at once?

Why they ask

Order picking and inventory are part of the role, and the interviewer wants to see method.

How to structure your answer

Process and prioritisation: list, group, check, label, dispatch.

Example answer

"I would set up each docket separately with its own crate or trolley, then pick one order at a time and cross off each line as I go. I group plants by bench so I am not walking back and forth, and I check quantities and plant quality before the order goes to dispatch. If two orders share the same species, I keep the labels and dockets with the right crate so nothing gets mixed. At the end I do a final check against the docket and let the supervisor know the order is ready."

6. This role involves repetitive lifting, potting and standing for long periods. How do you manage your physical stamina and safety across a full shift?

Why they ask

Physical stamina and safety awareness are essential and the employer wants to know you will work safely and reliably.

How to structure your answer

Practical self-management: warm-up, technique, pacing, hydration, reporting pain.

Example answer

"I start the shift by setting up my bench so I am not twisting or reaching awkwardly, and I use a trolley or forklift for heavy pallets instead of lifting them by hand. I keep my lifting technique steady, bend my knees, and take my scheduled breaks to stretch and drink water. I pace the repetitive work so I am consistent across the day rather than rushing early and fading later. If I felt a strain or pain, I would report it to the supervisor early rather than working through it and risking an injury."