

Nursery person interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for nursery person roles typically focus on practical horticultural knowledge, plant health, customer service and safety. Employers want to know you can work efficiently outdoors and handle both production and retail tasks.

- **Process:** Questions that ask you to walk through a task step by step, such as propagating a cutting or potting a plant.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences, often using 'tell me about a time' to assess teamwork, problem solving or customer service.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, such as dealing with a pest outbreak or an unhappy customer, to see how you think on your feet.
- **Technical:** Questions about plant health, soil, irrigation or tool use to test your horticultural knowledge.
- **Safety:** Questions about work health and safety procedures, including tool use, chemical handling and manual tasks.

The process usually starts with a phone screen or a short interview with a nursery manager, followed by a face-to-face interview. Many employers also include a practical component, such as identifying plants, taking cuttings or potting up. You may be asked to demonstrate safe tool use or explain how you would handle a common nursery task.

1. Walk me through how you propagate a plant from a cutting.

Why they ask

This tests your practical propagation skills and understanding of plant biology.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through: explain the tools you use, how you select and prepare the cutting, the rooting medium, and aftercare.

Example answer

"First, I select a healthy parent plant and take a cutting from a stem that has no flowers. I use sharp, clean secateurs to make a cut just below a node. I remove the lower leaves and dip the cut end in rooting hormone if needed. Then I plant the cutting into a well-draining mix, such as perlite and peat, and water it in. I place it in a warm, humid environment, like a greenhouse or a propagation tent, and monitor moisture and light until roots develop. Once roots are established, I pot the cutting on into a larger container."

2. Tell me about a time you had to deal with a pest or disease outbreak in a nursery.

Why they ask

This assesses your problem-solving and plant health knowledge, as well as your ability to act quickly.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Focus on how you identified the issue, the treatment you applied, and the outcome.

Example answer

"At a previous nursery, we had an outbreak of aphids on our rose stock. I noticed the signs early, with curled leaves and sticky residue, and reported it to the supervisor. I isolated the affected plants and

applied an appropriate insecticidal soap, following safety procedures. I also increased monitoring and removed heavily infested plants to prevent spread. Within a week, the aphid population was under control, and we saved most of the stock. I then helped review our integrated pest management plan to include more frequent inspections."

3. A customer comes in with a sick plant and wants advice. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests your customer service and diagnostic skills, which are key in retail nursery settings.

How to structure your answer

A client-facing scenario structure: greet, ask questions, inspect, advise, and follow up. Show empathy and practical knowledge.

Example answer

"I would greet the customer and ask what they have noticed about the plant. I would inspect the plant for common issues like pests, root rot or nutrient deficiency. Based on the symptoms, I might ask about watering habits, light and recent changes. I would then explain what I think is wrong and suggest a treatment, such as adjusting watering, repotting or applying a suitable product. I would also give them tips to prevent the issue returning and invite them to come back if they have further questions."

4. What's your approach to maintaining plant health across different seasons?

Why they ask

This checks your technical knowledge of plant care and how you adapt to changing conditions.

How to structure your answer

A technical explanation: outline seasonal tasks, monitoring, and adjustments to watering, feeding and climate control.

Example answer

"In spring and summer, I focus on watering and feeding as plants are actively growing, and I watch for pests. I adjust irrigation timers based on temperature and rainfall. In autumn, I reduce watering and prepare plants for slower growth, and in winter I protect sensitive plants from frost and reduce feeding. I regularly check soil moisture and pH, and I adjust greenhouse vents and heating to maintain ideal conditions. I also keep records of any issues so I can plan ahead for the next season."

5. Describe a time you worked as part of a team to complete a large potting or propagation job.

Why they ask

This assesses your teamwork and ability to work efficiently under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, focusing on your specific role, communication with others, and the result.

Example answer

"Last spring, our team had to pot up a large batch of seedlings for a landscape contract. I was responsible for preparing the potting mix and filling trays. I worked with two other nursery hands to divide the tasks, and we set up a production line to move plants from trays to pots. We communicated clearly about quantities and quality checks, and we finished the job ahead of schedule. The plants were ready for dispatch on time, and the supervisor praised our organisation."

6. What safety procedures do you follow when using pruning tools or pesticides?

Why they ask

This checks your awareness of work health and safety, which is critical in nurseries.

How to structure your answer

A safety checklist structure: list the key steps, such as PPE, tool maintenance, chemical handling and emergency procedures.

Example answer

"When using pruning tools, I always wear gloves and eye protection, and I make sure blades are sharp and clean to avoid accidents. I follow correct cutting techniques and never cut towards myself. For pesticides, I read the label and safety data sheet first, wear the required PPE, and apply chemicals only in suitable weather conditions. I store chemicals in a locked cabinet and follow the recommended withholding periods. I also make sure I know the location of the first aid kit and emergency contacts."