



**Plymouth Tree People  
Volunteer Tree Warden**

# **Skills & Competency Framework**

# Skills & Competency Framework

One of the pleasures of being a Volunteer Tree Warden is having the opportunity to learn more about trees and their care. Plymouth Tree People (PTP) has produced this informal competency framework to help you keep track of your journey and to help provide you with a focus for acquiring new knowledge and skills.

We want to invest in you by helping you learn and develop and in doing so we hope that your passion for trees continues to grow – just like they do!

Not everything listed under each Skills Checklists is necessary to achieve the certain level. Tree Wardens have a variety of important roles and not every Tree Warden is expected to fulfil every role. Volunteers are encouraged to extend their tree knowledge independently, both for interest and for building confidence in their role as a Tree Warden. For more information on developing your knowledge, please look at our Tree Warden Professional Development document.

You are invited to decide for yourself which skill level you have achieved and inform the Tree Warden Co-ordinator in March when you send over the record of your volunteer hours.

Information provided by you will only be seen only by the Co-ordinator and the Chair.

---

## Level 1 – Acorn

### Attitude

- ★ You are interested in trees, and you want to care for and champion trees in your area!

- ★ You might like to join other tree wardens on group sessions, training days and/or field trips.
- ★ You would like to gain experience.
- ★ You would be confident to work independently as you gain experience.

## Knowledge Checklist

- ★ You have read and signed the PTP Tree Warden induction document and read the “Guidance and Limitations for all Tree Wardens” (below).
- ★ You can identify when a tree needs some maintenance.

## Skills Checklist

- ★ You have carried out basic tree-care activities such as mulching, weeding, staking and tying and watering either independently or in a group session.
- ★ You have been acting as the ‘eyes and ears’ of PTP – Reporting queries to other Tree Wardens or the Tree Warden Co-ordinator.
- ★ You have read and understood a risk assessment.
- ★ You have been making a record of your volunteer hours. This helps PTP to evaluate the annual contribution that our volunteers make to preserving and improving Plymouth’s trees.

---

## Level 2 - Sapling

### Attitude

- ★ You are happy to talk to members of the public about the benefits of trees and to develop ways to encourage people to value their community’s trees.
- ★ You are interested in learning about the care of orchard trees.

## Knowledge Checklist

- ★ You fully understand the responsibilities and limitations of Tree Wardens and are familiar with the code of conduct.
- ★ You are familiar with the basic tools available for you to use.
- ★ You can identify the 10 or more of the most common UK tree species.
- ★ You can describe the benefits and potential problems of urban trees.
- ★ You can describe some common threats to tree health and can recognise signs of stress, decay, disease and vandalism.
- ★ You have received instruction in pruning techniques, hygiene precautions and when to prune.
- ★ You know when tree stakes should be removed.
- ★ You can explain the main responsibilities of tree owners.
- ★ You can explain the role and benefits of volunteer Tree Wardens.

## Skills Checklist

- ★ You have carried out all of the aftercare tasks for trees in their first five years after planting.
- ★ You may have demonstrated the basic techniques of tree maintenance to someone else.
- ★ You have worked alongside another Tree Warden on aftercare activities in your allocated area.
- ★ You might be confident in tree planting.
- ★ You have removed tree stakes (with others).
- ★ You may have supported another Tree Warden with either the Tree Council's School Orchards or Young Tree Champions projects.
- ★ You are competent in using tree ties.
- ★ You have carried out risk assessments for your own activities.
- ★ You have completed the Introduction to Trees Course.

## Level 3 Mature

### Attitude

- ★ You are happy to supervise other Tree Wardens.
- ★ You are competent and happy to work on your own.
- ★ You are happy to continue to grow your knowledge with further reading and/or courses in tree management and arboriculture.
- ★ You might be happy to spearhead Tree Council and local initiatives and campaigns.
- ★ You are keen to develop ways to reach out to local initiatives to encourage others to value the community's trees.

### Knowledge Checklist

- ★ You can suggest appropriate trees for planting – “right tree, right place”.
- ★ You can identify suitable locations for future tree planting projects.
- ★ You can identify the pests and diseases which need reporting to [Tree Alert](#).
- ★ You understand the potential issues people in the community may have with trees.
- ★ You can identify most of the common trees found in the UK.
- ★ You can recommend trees to Plymouth City Council to be covered by a Tree Preservation Order.
- ★ You have a thorough knowledge of the tools used by Tree Wardens and how to keep them well maintained.
- ★ You can explain why formative pruning is necessary and how it should be approached.

### Skills Checklist

- ★ You may have supported a more experienced Tree Warden on a guided tree walk.

- ✳ You have demonstrated how to plant a tree and all the basic elements of tree care to less experienced Tree Wardens.
  - ✳ You have contributed to the support and administration of Plymouth Tree People.
  - ✳ You have arranged a local tree planting day.
  - ✳ You have organised fundraising and/or source grant funding for new projects.
  - ✳ You may have worked with local groups and/or schools.
  - ✳ You are proficient in growing trees from seed – You are able to raise seedlings and keep records and you have taken part in tree nursery public events. You understand the importance of using seeds with known provenance and the importance of biosecurity.
  - ✳ You may have set up a tree nursery using locally collected seeds.
  - ✳ You may have assisted in the laying of a hedge.
  - ✳ You have completed a working outdoors first aid course.
  - ✳ You have carried out and recorded a risk assessment for a group activity.
  - ✳ You are an experienced Orchard Keeper – You understand how to carry out the right management of fruit trees across the seasons and you are able and happy to explain the importance of properly managing an orchard to members of the public and less experienced Tree Wardens.
- 

## **Level 4 Veteran**

### **Attitude**

- ✳ You are confident in all aspects of tree care and management.

### **Knowledge Checklist**

- ✳ You have planned and managed an urban tree planting project from first proposal to final establishment.

- ★ You have sufficient knowledge to comment on planning applications for works on trees subject to TPOs or trees in a Conservation Area

## Skills Checklist

- ★ You have led less experienced Tree Wardens in undertaking all elements of tree maintenance.
- ★ You have instructed others in all aspects of formative pruning and given practical demonstrations.
- ★ You have carried out a tree survey – You can identify ancient trees or instances of tree diseases as well as trees which appear to be resistant to those diseases. You have presented the results of your survey or significant findings to interested parties, such as landowners, the City Council and/or the Ancient Tree Register.
- ★ You are a proficient guided tree walk leader – You can research an area and plan a safe route. You can organise an interesting, informative walk where attendees feel welcome, and you can answer their questions.
- ★ You are a Project Facilitator – You are able to help plan a tree planting project which will result in planting the right trees in the right place for the long-term pleasure of local people. You are able to identify and assess the different options available taking into account how the project will be funded. You are comfortable opening lines of communication with project partners and community groups (if applicable), including delivery partners. You are able to communicate the options available, including the pros and cons and decide on an approach which have a consensus with residents.

## Guidance and Limitations for all Tree Wardens

All practical tasks must be preceded by a risk assessment and Tree Wardens must always ensure the safety of themselves and others.

As Tree Wardens you are the eyes, ears and voice for trees in your local community. Please stay safe and within the law – it's what's best for you and for the trees.

- ✳ All work must be carried out in daylight and with feet on ground.
- ✳ Make sure you are dressed for the task and have the right tools. It is fine to use your own tools but Plymouth Tree People holds a selection and can loan them on request.
- ✳ Power tools must not be used unless you are certified to do so and covered with the appropriate personal insurance.
- ✳ Work must not be undertaken along highways, unless the speed limit is 30 mph or slower and done while wearing a Hi-Viz jacket.
- ✳ Pruning must be limited to branches and stems of no more than 10cm diameter.
- ✳ Chemical weedkillers must not be used.
- ✳ You must never enter private land without the owner's written agreement.
- ✳ You must never advise whether a tree is safe – if it fails you would be liable.
- ✳ You must never undertake work beyond your physical ability or appropriate level of training.
- ✳ It is not your responsibility to try and resolve disputes regarding trees, if in doubt, refer to a Plymouth City Council Tree Officer.
- ✳ Work must never be carried out on trees which may result in the disturbance or destruction of wildlife during the nesting season.
- ✳ You must not do anything which would bring Plymouth Tree People or The Tree Council into disrepute.
- ✳ If you plan to use your own car to take people or tools to and from a work site, you should check that your insurance company covers you for this. Most companies include volunteer work as part of 'social, domestic and pleasure' use but some like to be informed if this is intended.
- ✳ Remember, you are working with people as much as with trees, try to share knowledge and ideas as much as possible.