

## For People Who Are NOT Canadian Citizens – Work Permit Information for Potential Tree Planters

ALL Canadian tree planting companies will require employees to have a valid working permit. NONE of them pay in cash anymore – that practice stopped about fifteen years ago! You will not be able to work “under the table,” so you MUST have a work permit if you want to plant trees in Canada.

First, you need to be aware that there are different requirements. A work permit is often mistakenly called a work visa. Visas and work permits are separate things. A visa allows you to travel in a country. Visitors to Canada from certain countries need a visa to travel in Canada. Visitors from certain other countries need what is called an Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA). Visitors from the United States fall into a third category. For example, American citizens don't need anything other than a passport to travel in Canada, whereas British and Australian citizens need an eTA and a passport, and visitors from many other countries need a full visa plus a passport. For more information about your required travel documents just to get into Canada, visit this website:

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/work/apply-who.asp>

In order to work in Canada, you need additional documentation beyond just a passport or travel visa or eTA. You need a work permit. There are different types of work permits, depending on the type of work you want. The most common is for what I'll call “career” jobs, even if they are only for a few years' duration. For a job like this, your employer needs to get a Labour Market Impact Assessment to see if they're allowed to sponsor you as an employee, and then if they succeed, the employer needs to apply on your behalf for a work permit. Let me be absolutely clear: No company will EVER do this for a tree planter. This approach is used for professionals such as doctors, engineers, etc. This approach is not valid for labour jobs, or for seasonal work like tree planting. Here is a link to information about regular work permits, although it is completely useless if you want to plant trees in Canada:

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/work/apply-who.asp>

I believe that international students who are already studying in Canada are able to get off-campus work permits relatively easily, but you must be enrolled for full-time study in a Canadian university or other institution to qualify, so I'll ignore that option for now. International students who are in this position probably already understand how to apply for work permits that are available to students, and if you don't, talk to the career counselling office at your institution for assistance.

There is one other program that non-Canadians should be aware of, and you don't have to be studying at a Canadian educational institution to apply. It is part of an initiative called the International Experience Canada (IEC) program, which has three different “Experience” options: Working Holiday, Young Professional, and International Co-op Internship. The first of these three options, Working Holiday, may be useful for some non-Canadians who wish to seek summer employment as tree planters. People from SOME countries are eligible to apply for this program. You can visit this page to see if your country is one of those that are eligible. There are about thirty separate countries on the list:

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/work/iec/eligibility.asp>

You'll note that many Commonwealth countries are on the eligible list. That's not a surprise. However, what might surprise many people is that the United States is not on the list, which means that US citizens are not able to apply for a Working Holiday visa and a work permit in Canada. Perhaps this is because the US has the same restrictions for Canadians, who are not allowed to work casually in the United States (the only option for us Canadians to work in the US is through a long and complicated visa application process sponsored by an employer).

The “Working Holiday” program is usually good for either 12 or 24 months. I believe that this program is only available to people who are between the ages of 18 and 30, and who are from countries that are listed on the “eligible list” already mentioned. For non-Canadians who are NOT studying in Canada, the Working Holiday option appears to be the **only** way that you can get the work permit that you'll need if you want to become a tree planter.

However, let me break some bad news to you right now. Many Canadian planting companies will not hire non-Canadians who have “working holiday” visas. The problem is that there is a steep learning curve for tree planters, and the best tree planters are the ones who have done it for several seasons. EVERY company wants to hire people with as much experience as possible, because those people are the most productive.

If you are on a working holiday visa, you are not going to be eligible to work enough seasons to become an efficient tree planter. The maximum duration of your visa is for twenty-four months. So by the time a company has spent a couple years turning you into an efficient high-production planter, you aren’t allowed to work in Canada anymore. Planting companies prefer to look for candidates who can put at least four or five years into the industry.

Since there are many Canadian citizens and permanent residents applying for tree planting jobs, planting companies will always try to hire the “best applicants,” and an applicant who is able to work in Canada for several years has a huge advantage over someone who is not allowed to work more than one or two seasons. Be aware that this is based on the type of visa, not the fact that you’re a foreigner! Someone studying in Canada who can potentially plant for at least three seasons should not have to worry about this issue.

I am not saying that any companies will refuse to hire you because you are a foreigner with a working holiday visa. However, if they have lots of applications (and all companies do), then it makes more sense for them to hire the Canadians who will hopefully be available as employees for many years. Unfortunately for foreign workers, there are lots of Canadians competing for a very limited number of tree planting positions. Think about this: British Columbia, which is the province that is most well-known for its reforestation industry, has about 4.5 million people. There are only about 4,500 positions for tree planters in the entire province, and only a thousand or so of those positions each year are filled by new, inexperienced workers. The unemployment rate in BC was recently around 7%. That’s a LOT of Canadians who are looking for a very small number of jobs. Why would a company hire a foreigner with long-term work restrictions, when there are hundreds of eager Canadian applicants without such restrictions?

I wish I had better news for foreign applicants, but it is better to tell you what is really happening in Canada. A very small number of people on working holiday visas will occasionally succeed in finding a tree planting job, but the odds are extremely discouraging. That small handful of foreigners who manage to secure work usually only find jobs at the worst companies, where Canadians don’t want to work. I am also aware of instances where planting companies have cheated foreigners because the company knows that the foreigner is very unlikely to seek the help of the Employment Standards Branch to support their rights as a worker in Canada.

The IEC “working holiday” program is a great program, if you’re qualified. However, if you want to travel in Canada and do a bit of work, you may want to try to find a job in the hospitality industry, working in a bar, pub, or restaurant. There are hundreds of thousands of such positions available all across Canada, and tens of thousands of employers who are receptive to job applications from travelers. Besides, you’d have a lot more fun and meet a lot more people in a hospitality position than you would being stuck in the woods for three months with a few dozen dirty tree planters.