

Becoming a Certified Arborist in Central Florida

1. Understand the Legal Framework in Florida

Florida's Arborist Licensing Law (Chapter 598, F.S.) makes current ISA certification a prerequisite for state licensure. In essence, to call yourself a "Florida-licensed arborist" you must:

- Hold a current International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist or Board-Certified Master Arborist credential.
- Carry the required liability, workers' comp, and (if not government-employed) errors & omissions insurance.
- Submit an application, pay the annual fee (\leq \$300), and sign to adhere to ANSI and ISA standards.

2. Meet ISA Eligibility Requirements

To sit for the ISA Certified Arborist® exam you must document either:

- Three years of full-time (~5,385 hours) practical arboriculture experience; or
- An accredited degree plus reduced experience:
 - Associate's + 2 courses in arboriculture + 2 years' experience
 - Bachelor's + 4 courses + 1 year's experience

3. Study for the ISA Certified Arborist Exam

The exam covers 10 domains, weighting topics roughly as follows:

- Tree Biology (14%)
- Soils & Nutrient Management (11%)
- Diagnosis & Treatment (15%)
- Roots, Trunk & Branch Structure (10%)
- Pruning (12%)
- Tree Risk (11%)
- Safe Work Practices (15%)
- Equipment (8%)
- Urban Forestry & Tree Protection (6%)

Key study focus areas:

- Tree biology & identification (especially Florida natives like oaks, palms, citrus)
- ANSI A300 pruning standards and Z133 safety
- Pest & disease ID (e.g. citrus greening, oak wilt)
- Soil science, fertilization, and water management in Central Florida's sandy soils
- Climbing, rigging & equipment operation

- Risk assessment protocols (aim for later ISA TRAQ qualification)

4. Apply, Schedule & Pass the Exam

- Apply for eligibility via the ISA website, submitting your experience/education documentation and fee.
- Enroll and schedule your exam at a Pearson VUE or other authorized testing center (e.g., Orlando, Tampa).
- Pass the 200-question, multiple-choice exam to become an ISA-Certified Arborist®.

5. Obtain Florida State Licensure

With your ISA credential in hand:

- Secure required insurance (liability, workers' comp, E&O; if needed).
- Submit your FDACS application, including proof of age (≥ 18), current ISA certification, insurance certificates, and adherence to industry standards.
- Pay the license fee (up to \$300/year).
- Receive your state arborist license and ID card.

6. Maintain & Advance Your Credentials

Continuing requirements:

- ISA CEUs: 30 credits every 3 years to renew your Certified Arborist® credential.
- State renewals: Annual license renewal with proof your ISA certification remains current.
- Advanced Specialties: Consider ISA TRAQ, Utility or Municipal Specialist, or Board-Certified Master Arborist.

Summary of Core Knowledge Areas

- Tree Biology & Identification (native species, anatomy)
- Plant Health Care (soils, fertilization, pest & disease management)
- Pruning & Structural Care (ANSI A300)
- Safety & Equipment (ANSI Z133; climbing, chainsaws, lifts)
- Risk Assessment (hazard evaluation, mitigation)
- Regulatory & Professional Standards (Florida Chapter ISA, FDACS rules, ISA Code of Ethics)