

1. Licensing

Licensing rules are set by each state, and sometimes by the county or city. Start here.

Ask before you work for pay. Whether you need a license depends on the services you sell and where you work. This kit does not list any state's rules. It tells you what to check and who to ask.

- ☐ **List the services you plan to sell.** For example: mowing, trimming, edging, blowing, cleanups, mulch, hedge trimming, and anything with fertilizer, weed killer or pest products. Each one can have its own rules.
- ☐ **Fertilizer, weed killer or pest products.** If you plan to apply any of these on a customer's property, ask your state agriculture department (or the agency that handles pesticides where you live) whether you need an applicator license or certification first. Do not apply them for pay until you know the answer. If you carry them, keep the label and safety data sheet for each product and read the label before every use.
- ☐ **Hardscape, irrigation or tree work.** Some places license landscape contractors for patios, walls, sprinklers or tree work. Ask your state contractor licensing board and your city or county whether those jobs need a license, and what you can do without one.
- ☐ **City or county business license.** Ask your city and your county whether you need one, where the business is based and where you work, since they can differ.
- ☐ **Local noise and work-hour rules.** Ask your city or county about noise limits and the hours you are allowed to run mowers, trimmers and blowers. Some places also have rules for leaf blowers. Ask any HOA you work for about its rules too.
- ☐ **Yard waste.** Ask your city, county or waste hauler where you can drop off clippings, leaves and brush, and whether there are fees or rules.
- ☐ **Put renewal dates on your calendar** for every license and certification you hold, and keep copies in one folder. Ask whether your state requires a license number on estimates, invoices, ads or the truck.

2. Business setup

- ☐ **Choose a business structure:** sole proprietor, LLC or corporation. The right one depends on your state, your taxes and your risk, so talk to an accountant or attorney first.
- ☐ **Register your business name** if you use one other than your own legal name. Ask your state or county where.
- ☐ **Get your free EIN (Employer Identification Number) from the IRS at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov).** The IRS does not charge for it. Do not pay a website to get one for you.
- ☐ **Open a business bank account.** Keep business and personal money apart and run every business payment through it.
- ☐ **Set up bookkeeping before your first customer.** Pick a spreadsheet, accounting software or a bookkeeper. Record every sale and expense and keep your receipts.
- ☐ **Ask your accountant how much to set aside for taxes** and when to pay. Set up a separate savings account for it.
- ☐ **Ask whether you must collect sales tax** on lawn services or on materials like mulch and seed where you work, and how to register if so. The rules differ by state.