



Starting Work in Horticulture

A guide to getting your season off the ground



A GUIDE FOR YOU

If you're starting a seasonal job in horticulture, this guide is for you!

Learn the basics of starting out, what to expect, and how to get the most out of your job.

Remember every grower and employer is different and the type of work and the work environment. The days, hours, pay, transport, and accommodation will differ from place to place depending on who you work for.

This guide talks about all types of horticulture including orchard, packhouse, and field work. Once you start your job you will learn more about your crop and the jobs you may do.

Think about this when you are looking for a job and ask the employer any questions .



APPLY FOR A JOB TODAY

PickNZ is New Zealand's horticulture seasonal work job board. It covers all regions, and all crops. Put in your application online now.

[Apply Now](#)

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE

Click on the topic you'd like to read further.

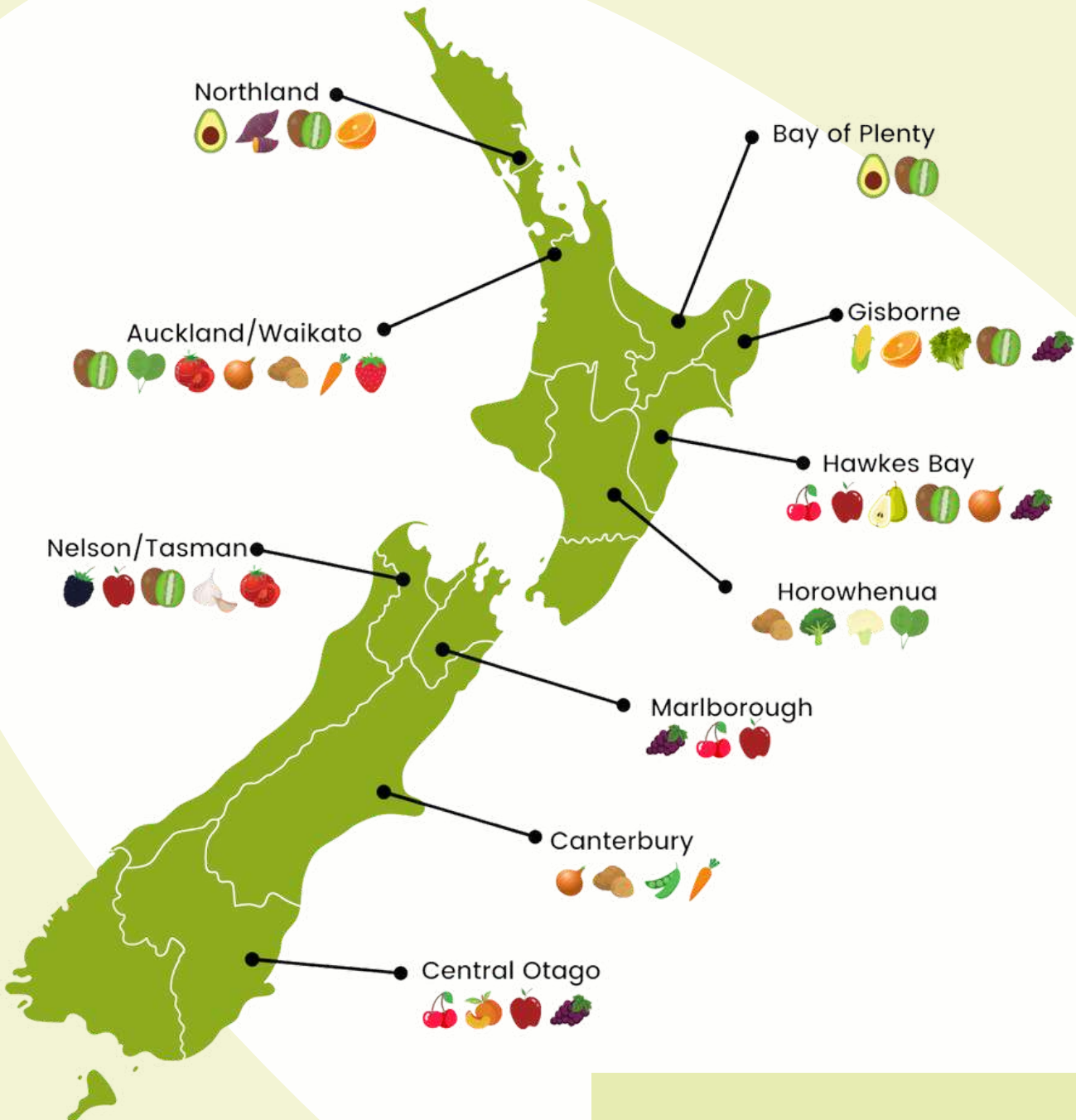
- [New Zealand Horticulture at a Glance](#)
- [Introduction Into Horticulture](#)
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NEW ZEALAND AT A GLANCE

REGIONAL MAP

Different crops do best in different conditions, so each region of Aotearoa suits and grows different crops. Warmer regions such as Northland and Bay of Plenty are ideal for growing tropical avocados, while the cooler Central Otago climate is perfect for cherries. Check out what grows where.



LEARN MORE

Horticulture brings in billions of dollars to New Zealand every year. Click below to learn more.

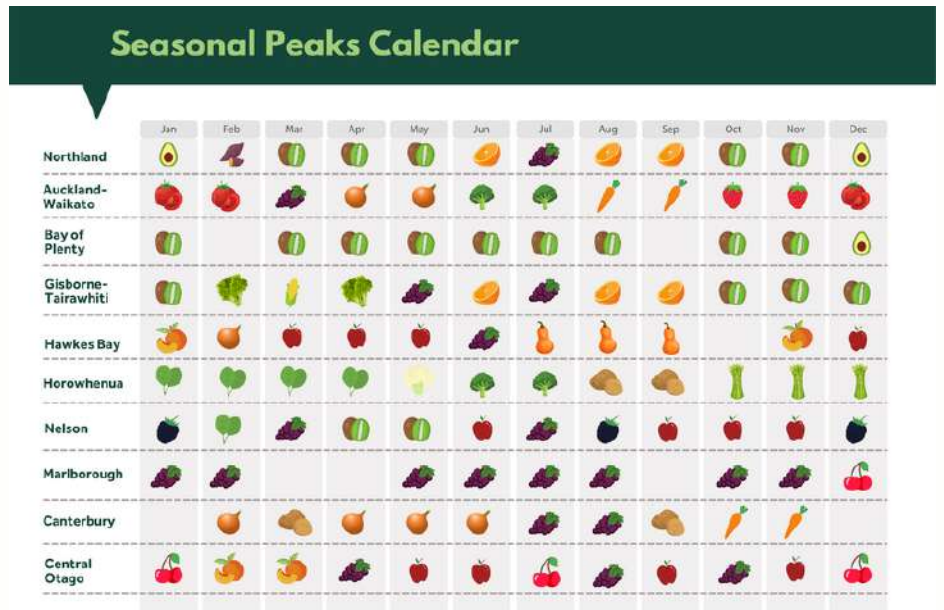
[Click here](#)

INTRO TO HORTICULTURE

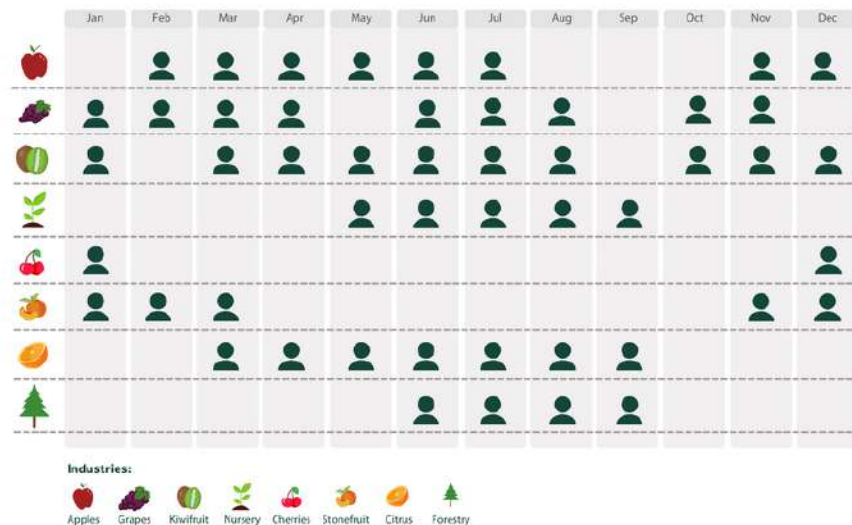
New to the industry? Here's some facts to start you off.

SEASONAL NATURE

A unique feature of horticulture is its seasonality. Different fruits and vegetables grow at different times of the year. There are differences in the length of time a crop is planted and produces a harvest. Annual crops are planted and harvested within one year, e.g. onions. Perennial crops are planted and produce a crop to harvest for many growing seasons, such as fruit trees.



New Zealand Regional Calendar of Seasonal Peak Crops



New Zealand Calendar of Seasonal Peak Crops Labour

LABOUR PEAKS

This means across the country there are different labour requirements or peaks for different regions through the year. The type of work also differs through the year. For example, trees are pruned in winter ready for new growth in spring. In summer, orchard workers focus on harvesting.

INTRO TO HORTICULTURE

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WEATHER DEPENDENT

How does the weather affect your work?

Weather is a big factor in the industry. For a growing operation, the climate can change the result of your crop. Even short weather events like heavy rain, prolonged dry periods, hail, or frost, can change the outcome of a crop.

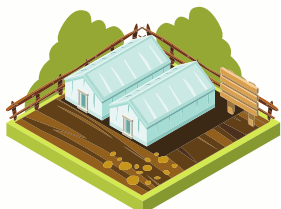
Growers manage this by having practices or equipment in place to prevent weather events from decimating their harvest. For example, it is common for high-value crops like grapes and avocados to install frost sprinklers to protect their crops.

Weather events can also affect what jobs can or should be done during the week. For example it is not possible to cultivate soil or harvest in heavy rain; or a frost may mean you need to do thinning of crop earlier than expected.

If you are working in an orchard or in the field it is normal for your working week to change due to weather, including not working some days due to rain.

To learn more about how horticultural businesses are affected by COVID. Check out the HortNZ website below.

[Click here](#)



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

You can expect your working day to start early, especially when working outdoors. Flexibility and start times will vary with each crop. For example, mechanical grape harvesting operates 24 hours a day so you may be needed for a night shift, while kiwifruit picking is always done during the daytime, starting early morning and finishing late afternoon.

Horticultural work is largely team-based. You will most likely move through your day with a team that is briefed regularly by a supervisor or manager. You may also move from one location to another during the day or week.

All required gear and equipment including Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) will be provided.

ROLES

Orchard

Orchard process and roles.

Our industry is steered by the seasons. What jobs we do on the orchard depends on the weather and seasons.



During Winter trees are bare and are planted, pulled out or pruned. Pruning gets rid of dead, unwanted branches and sets up the tree or vine to get the best possible light and fruit.



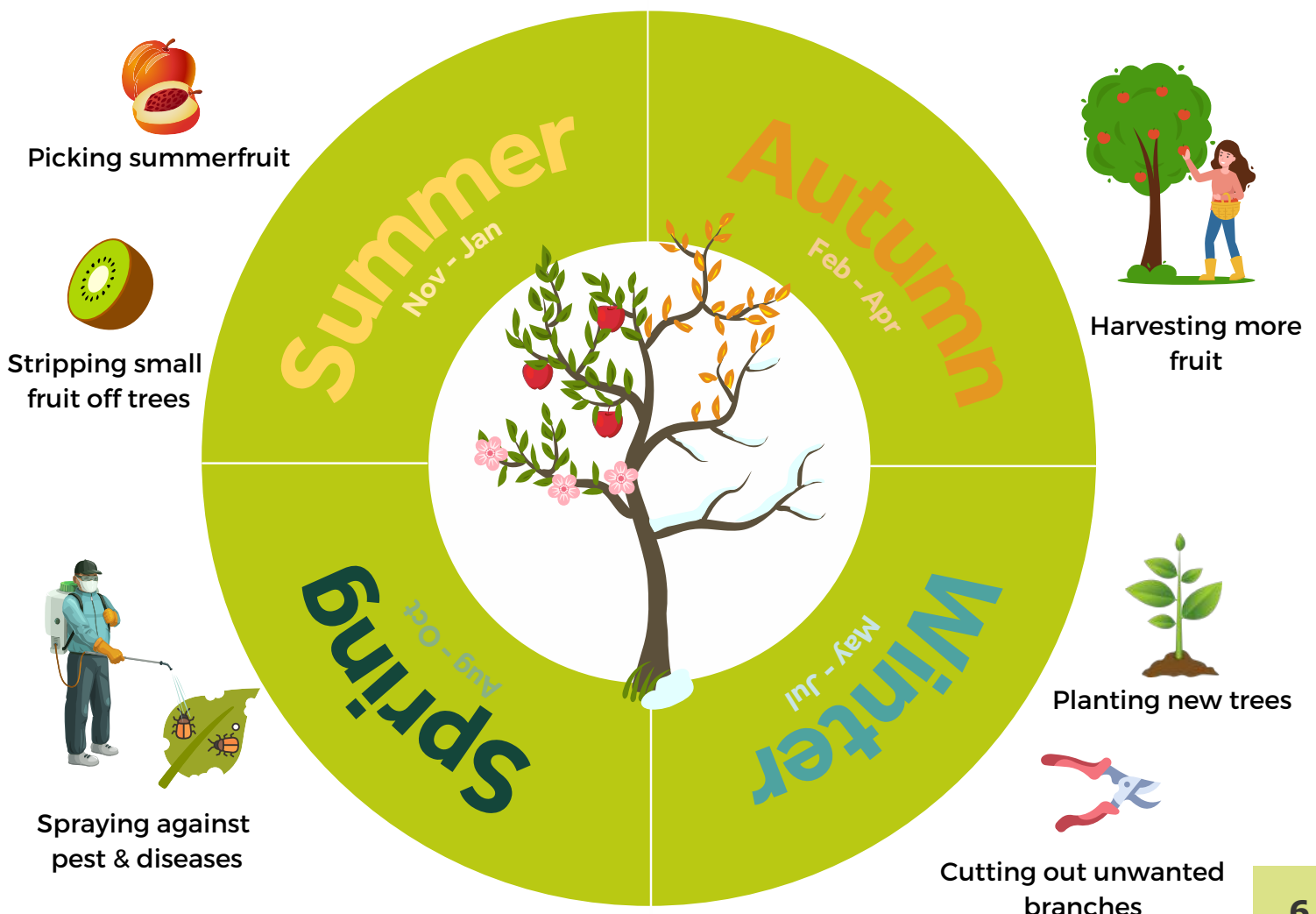
During Spring the weather warms up and the bugs arrive. This means we need to focus on controlling pests with traps and using sprays to keep them away.



From November flowers will change into small fruit. Summer fruit like peaches and cherries will be picked. Another big task during this time is to remove some of the small fruit from the trees to allow more energy to go into the medium-sized fruit (known as thinning).



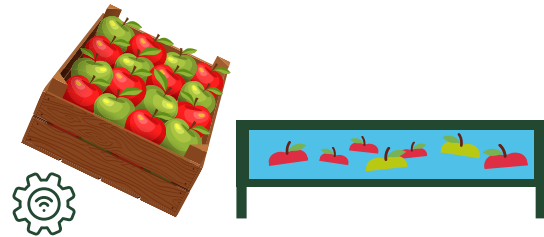
From **Autumn** fruit on trees and vines have grown and are ready to be picked. During this time we need the most people because there is only a small window of opportunity to pick the fruit when it's at its best quality i.e. size, colour, texture.



ROLES

Packhouse

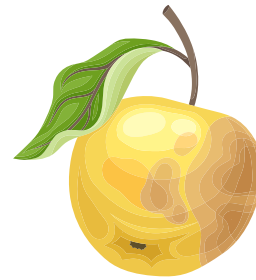
Packhouse or packing roles.



1

WASHING

the fruit to remove dirt and leaves



2

SCANNING

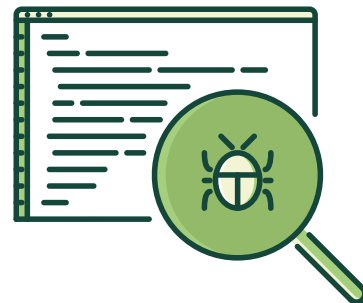
for defects like bruises and marks



3

GRADING

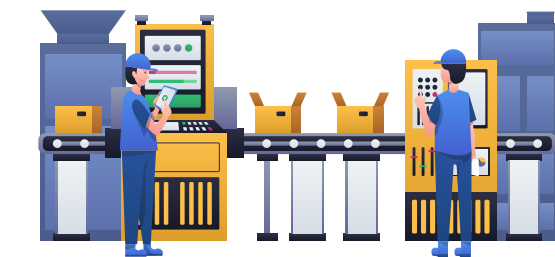
to keep fruit together that are of similar size & quality



4

QUALITY CHECK

to keep unwanted pests and diseases out of fruit boxes



5

PACKING

with the correct labels for the right sales market and done expertly to ensure fruit is not crushed



6

COOL STORAGE

to keep produce fresh until it can be delivered to its sale point



Job can be done with technology



Job is done with people

ROLES

Outdoor or field cropping roles.

Cropping

Another space you can work is field cropping. Common horticultural produce grown on a field are leafy greens such as spinach or lettuce, and other vegetables such as potatoes, onions, or broccoli.

The main difference between field cropping and orchard is that field crops are annual and are cultivated, grown and cleared from the field each year. In an orchard, plants are perennial so the trees or vines will stay in for many seasons. It's **more common** in field cropping to have a higher consistency and variety of work on one property.



JOBS ON A CROPPING OPERATION

Cultivating/ground prep

The start of a cropping season usually requires some sort of ground cultivation or preparation. This is usually done by tractor, and depending on the crop needs and soil type, the tractor uses different cultivation attachments. The timing of cultivation is important, as cultivating during wet weather can damage soil.

Sowing/planting

This is when seeds or seedlings are planted in the ground for the crop. This is usually done mechanically but can be done by hand or both.

Pest and disease control

Pest and disease pressure will increase at certain times of the year, depending on pest lifecycle and weather conditions. Common jobs during these times are spraying, pest monitoring, and integrated pest management planning.

Fertilizer application

Most crops receive fertilizer when first planted (base dressing) and a top-up further through the season (side dressing). Some common fertilizer nutrients are nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), and potassium (K), with other micro-nutrients applied as needed. Fertilizer can be applied as a solid, or dissolved as a liquid and applied via tractor.

Irrigation

Many field crops require irrigation (watering) throughout the season. There are also different ways to deliver irrigation and this will differ based on crop requirements. Setting up, calibrating, and develop irrigation schedules is a sought-after skill set.

Harvesting

Harvest is the removal of the edible part of the plants when they are ready for market. Harvesting can be done mechanically or by hand. Lots of labour is needed during this time.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT STEPS

Before signing your name on the dotted line, here's what you need to know!



Pre-employment refers to the process before you sign a contract of employment.

Work Visa

If you're **not** a New Zealand Resident or Citizen you will need a work visa.

[Click here to find out more](#)

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE:

Personal ID

Some employers may require ID such as a birth certificate, passport, student ID, car driver's license or other.

IRD Number

An Inland Revenue Department (IRD) number is used to keep track of the tax you pay, and the entitlements you receive, and is needed when you sign up with an employer. Find out your IRD number below.

[IRD Number](#)

Bank Account Number

You will need your own bank account in order to be paid. If you don't already have one, visit one of your local branches (ANZ, BNZ, KiwiBank, ASB etc..) today!

Contract

Your employer **MUST** give you a contract.

Always read your contract carefully and don't be afraid to ask your employer, a friend, or a professional, any questions or if you have any concerns.

WORKFIT TESTS

Some employers may require you to take a drug test before employment, particularly if you'll be handling machinery. Feel free to ask!

VACCINATIONS

Being vaccinated is strongly recommended if you work in the horticulture industry.

If you're not vaccinated yet, but are interested, your employer may be able to support you.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT INDUCTION

Before you start work your employer will take you through a health and safety induction. Find out more [here](#).

WITH YOUR CONTRACT

Expect to have outlined the maximum hours you will work in a week, holiday hours/pay, entitlements to breaks, and to be paid at least minimum wage.

Click below to learn more about employee working conditions.

[Click here](#)

ACCOMMODATION

What accommodation and travel may look like.

TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation may be different depending on your needs, region, and type of work. Here are some options common among horticulture workers.



On-site



Backpacker hostels



Renting a house or room



Holiday homes



Campervans



Camping/cabins



Motels



Marae or shearers quarters

[Click here to learn more](#)

TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

Like accommodation, your needs may vary depending on your employer and living situation.

Some employers offer transport and carpooling but this isn't always the case. Public transport can be an issue as often horticulture work is rural and not on main access roads.

You should keep this in mind when applying and choosing accommodation options.

ACCOMMODATION RESOURCES

[Hostelworld](#)

[Airbnb](#)

[Backpacker Board](#)

Tip:

Check local Facebook groups and Trademe for room and property listings.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Get help with costs like travel, clothing or temporarily moving home, when you're starting seasonal horticulture or viticulture work. Contact Work and Income to learn about the New Zealand Seasonal Work Scheme. Note that this is only available to NZ residents or citizens.

[Click here](#)



PAY

Here's a simple breakdown on everything you need to know about being paid.

PAID HOURLY

What does it mean to be paid hourly?

This one is pretty self-explanatory. If you are paid this way the amount will be written in your signed employment contract.

This value has to be AT LEAST the minimum wage. Click below to find out what the minimum wage is for you.

[Minimum Wage](#)

CONTRACT RATES

What does it mean to be paid contract rates?

Contract rates, otherwise known as **piece rates**, is a payment system where the amount you earn, depends on the variety of the crop, and how much you pick.

This is done to reflect the quality of the crop being picked. For example, a high-quality fruit could have a contract rate of \$45 per unit (e.g bins, buckets, crates) compared to a low quality fruit, which may only have a contract rate of \$24 per unit.

The number of units you pick will determine your pay at the end of your working day, and each day will be different because the contract rate may be changed daily or weekly. If you are being paid a contract rate, your employer must guarantee at least a minimum wage rate.

HOLIDAY PAY

What is holiday pay?

On top of your contract rate, if you are working for less than a year, you will usually be paid an extra 8% holiday pay.

[Find out more](#)



KIWI SAVER

When you first sign up, you may be asked to start your own KiwiSaver. A small percentage of your earnings will go into a savings account to be used by yourself at a later date. Your employer will also have to contribute at least 3% to your KiwiSaver

[Find out more](#)

REST BREAKS

Under NZ Employment Laws anyone employed is entitled to rest breaks,

Employers must pay for rest breaks but don't have to pay for meal breaks. Rest breaks must be a minimum of 10 minutes, and meal breaks at least 30 minutes.

[Find out more](#)

Feel like you're being treated unfairly?

[Your worker rights](#)

HEALTH AND SAFETY

A guide to staying safe in your workplace.



Health and safety is an important aspect in your everyday working environment. Working outdoors with machinery, and exposure to weather and other environmental factors, can put you at higher risk of injury; there are steps and processes to follow that will ensure your safety and that of others.

COMMON RISKS

Common health and safety risks

Tripping Hazards

When working outdoors or with machinery being aware of holes or ditches around you is important.

Chemical Hazards

When chemicals are used on site, following chemical safety sheets, adherence to safety signs and correct PPE can prevent chemical exposure, burns and other injuries.

Machinery

Appropriate PPE needs to be worn, such as Hi-vis. Be aware of what machinery is operating around you and the risks from them.

Noise/hearing loss

Use of PPE around loud machinery can help prevent this.

THE NUMBER 1 RULE

Get your health and safety induction

Your employer is responsible for ensuring you are inducted when you start your job. Each orchard, farm, packhouse or other working environment, should have health and safety plans and procedures unique to that property. Make sure you ask your employer for your health and safety induction when you start, and are provided with the personal protective equipment (PPE) you need.



What to wear:

- Comfortable clothes to move in
- Weather protective (sun hat, jacket)
- Closed toed shoes
- Sunscreen
- Appropriate PPE
- Minimal jewelry
- Drinking water

Heat stress/Hypothermia

When working outdoors, periods of extreme heat or cold can occur. Along with heat stress, dehydration and sunburn are also risks. Protective gear and staying hydrated can limit this risk.

Fatigue

Loss of focus can occur with fatigue, which can increase the risk of injury or accidents. Recognizing fatigue and taking rest periods can mitigate this risk.

NEXT STEPS IN HORT

Where to from here? Information for those considering further study and career options in horticulture.



HORTICULTURE AS A CAREER

Join New Zealand's fastest growing industry

Be part of an exciting industry, leading the way in healthy sustainable food production. Join an industry where you get to develop technology, grow food, design new products and sell them to the world.

This industry is set for significant future growth and innovation, and you could play an important part in this future.

Consider your next step, what does your future in horticulture look like? Check out your options on this page.

THE GOHORT NETWORK



The GoHort Career Progression Manager network, has people in every region that you can contact to help start your next step in horticulture

[Contact now](#)



Permanent work & internships



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