

TREE

TALK

by

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Having taken a look last month at the American attitude to the Greenkeeper's place in golf, as highlighted in their greenkeeping magazines, it might be interesting to go on by taking a look at some of the other subjects the American Head Greenkeeper is always being advised about.

One of the simplest and most wide-open of them is that of trees and shrubs on golf courses, or, as they put it, "beautifying the course". Once again, the responsibility for the whole subject is thrown firmly—almost harshly—upon the Head Greenkeeper, who seems to be expected to take responsibility for just about anything.

That's right, really, of course; for breathes there a greenkeeper anywhere who wants anyone else interfering with his course, without yielding to him as, at least, the final arbiter of what's done, where, how and when.

Over here we look rather differently at the subject of trees on courses. Our

first interest is much more with their place as hazards and as shapers of holes than with their purely decorative effects. The two do combine, though: and combining them to best effect and purpose is something of an art.

Using Native Trees

First, what sort of trees and where? "Trees should blend with the landscape and native material is usually very desirable," says *The Greenkeepers' Reporter*. We could almost translate that as: "Use trees which grow readily on your ground, and put them where they look as if they belong." There's no doubt that this superficially over-simple advice is sound.

Think of all the courses where trees form, shape and provide special tactical hazards for play; and nearly all of them depend on trees growing naturally on the course, either with the holes designed around them, or with extra seedlings planted where the Greenkeeper thinks they can improve a hole. Often, the trees which have become a known and loved feature of the course have been self-sown from the seed carried by wind and bird from trees already around the course; and often they stand where they stand now simply because the Greenkeeper decided to let them grow where they started up.

Stop and Think

This can, in fact, be quite a point to bear in mind when carrying through the usual programme of trimming and clearing the rough, or even when trimming around existing bunkers. It's the work of a second to slice off a young tree four or five inches high, wherever it makes its own attempt on life. It may take a few seconds more to stop and think about it.

Of course, here conditions are on the Greenkeeper's side. If he lets it grow a bit, and then decides he doesn't like it there, he can always take it out. If he destroys it the moment it pops its little green nose up, then the choice is lost to him.

On the matter of trees, in fact, the Greenkeeper can always look ahead, maybe decades ahead (and he's probably the only man in the club who does). He's free to use his own imagination, and—especially if he is a keen golfer

himself—to improve or embellish the course according to his own instincts for it.

There's a lot to be said, of course, especially nowadays, for trees, or even a single tree, as a trouble-free hazard. A tree doesn't normally have to be raked, trimmed, cut or replenished! And as a fair hazard to a wild shot—especially if it is kept clear underneath—it can be without equal.

A Seedling Saved

A tree in the corner of a dog-leg, for instance, can prove a tremendously effective addition to a hole. One of the best holes I know in Britain owes both its character and its challenge almost entirely to a single large birch tree which an old genius of a greenkeeper reprieved as a natural seedling in the twenties, and left standing within the corner of the left-hand dog-leg, twenty to forty yards beyond the length of a good drive. Its effect is immediate. Any drive pulled to the left of a large open fairway, away from some gorse and trees on the right, brings the timid player a fair reward of having to play a medium or long iron high over the tree, or else to hook the shot round it, or else to play safe to its right, which leaves him with a substantial chip to get his four. It's a very beautiful tree, too, this one, as a single birch can often be: and if there was any move now to cut down that little seedling the imaginative old greenkeeper allowed to grow, there'd be near-revolution in the club!

Effective Hazards

Another advantage of trees, particularly trees like birch, beech, chestnut or holly, is that they can be kept clear underneath, so that any man can find his ball, but still remain wholly effective hazards; and in that they are better than thick grass or gorse. They can almost make a world of difference to the charm of a course if planted between adjacent holes, so that as they grow, you can no longer see players coming the opposite way up an adjoining fairway. Used thus, they can enclose a hole in its own world: which tends to make it a more individual and enjoyable one.

Trees can also be used in a challenging and slightly off-beat way. The drive to the 12th at Wentworth's West Course, over the row of conifers, put even Arnold Palmer off his stroke this autumn: leading him to cock one up a bit and hook it into the woods on the left further on. There's a single tree, too, somewhere near the middle of the first fairway at Rosemount, at Blairgowrie in Perth, where it serves much the same tactical purpose as some of the mid-fairway bunkers on the Old Course at St. Andrews.

A good tree or clump of trees can most effectively guard one side of the entrance to a green, too, to any shot from a more timid line of approach, or from the line a long hitter has to take to get up in two shots at a long hole. But here, as any Greenkeeper knows, you may need to be a bit canny about putting the trees close to the actual green. Apart from root troubles, it is apparently a fact that an average 18 ins. diameter tree has about 120,000 leaves. It's not just the bother of clearing them off the green every autumn. It's the wonderful meal they provide for worms, just where you don't want to encourage the brutes!

Tree Nursery

The Americans seem to be all for each Greenkeeper making his own tree and shrub nursery: from which he can transplant chosen trees from year to year. In many of our bare courses, this may be an idea worth thinking about. But on most of them, one might guess, nature provides the nursery readily enough—wherever the rough grows thick and deep.

Which of our varieties are best for which sort of course is a matter of purely individual opinion. But, apart from the ever-present conifers of sand country, the ones which seem best to combine usefulness as hazards with beauty and grace might be: birch, beech, holly, chestnut, wild cherry and wild apple—easy enough to come by, all of them, as any boy knows who's grown all of them from gathered seed: let alone the vast free nursery nature provides everywhere, on heath, woodland and even hedgerow.

Maybe it's all a bit easier over here than in America, really.