

# Landscaping the green: Part I

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A golf green, no matter how superior the quality of the turf, without a suitable landscape to "finish" it, is much like a diamond in the rough without a proper setting. The diamond may be of the finest cut and extremely expensive, but place it in the palm of your hand and it can actually look rather commonplace. Put the same diamond in a high quality "setting" of a ring, necklace, or stick pin, and like magic it takes on the aura of beauty.

It is the same thing with a fine golf green. It can have the greatest turf possible, it can be contoured with professional subtlety, it can be located on the most prestigious course in the land — but — without a proper landscape setting, i.e. a green background and framing, it is "just another green".

This happens all too often, even on courses that comprise "the tour". We believe that a golf course can and should be much more than just a place to hit a ball around until you get it into the hole.

## Great golf holes should also be beautiful

Think back—or start looking from this day on—to all the courses you have seen or played, and recall how few holes really caught your attention for their sheer beauty. Not many! A few great courses may have half of the

greens with spectacular backgrounds, but most courses are fortunate to have four or five such holes with only adequate landscaping associated with its greens.

Our guess as to why there are so few truly beautiful golf holes is not for

reasons of expense only, but also one of putting off to the future what should be done this year. Golfers can be so intent on their game that they do not take the time to actively appreciate where they are during their round of golf. (Professionals are the most extreme in this— they **must** concentrate on their game or they will be out of work!) The golfer, along with the fisherman and hunter, are the lucky people for they have chosen these activities for their off hours enjoyment. The angler or huntsman must take the landscape as he finds it.

The golfer is set aside from the other two in that he is surrounded by mostly a man-made scene, and has the opportunity to create the living beauty that is the golf course. Even though concentration on the game is essential, an awareness of the beauty of the course is another reward of playing the game of golf. It is obvious, therefore, that any drab, uninteresting green should be given a planned background planting. We refer to groupings of plants varying in size, shape and texture, against which the green is looked at and played up on.

## Isolate the green

The first goal of such a landscape setting is to more or less isolate the





SKETCH #3. SAME GREEN AS SKETCH #1. HERE YOU EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF SECLUSION, PRIVACY AND QUIET—NOW THE GREEN HAS A PROPER SETTING.

area immediately around the green from the rest of the course. The player's line of sight should not be able to reach beyond the green on to the next tee, green, or fairway. Ideally, the golfer should only be aware of the hole he is playing on and not have his concentration broken by activity on adjacent holes.

When the players arrive on the green itself, they should have the feeling of being in an area that is practically set aside for silence, stillness, and privacy. We do not mean for them to be walled in by deep, dense foliage. It should only suggest that these desirable conditions do exist.

#### Give the golfer a target

By placing a green planting in back of the green, the flag becomes easily visible as you look to the green while preparing your shot to the pin. It will

be able to hold the golfer's undivided attention. No one will have to ask where the flag is. In reality a proper background planting assists the golfer in judging the distance to the flagsticks. The green then becomes a very definable target. This especially so when it happens to be a blind green. With good tree selection and placement, and after the trees get some size to them, the golfer can use the tops of the trees as his aiming point. How much better for a member hosting a newcomer to the course to say "shoot for the tall trees" instead of "shoot for the smoke stack or that billboard." (See Sketch #1 which shows through the green background to another hole and houses off the course.)

#### Framing

Framing the golfer's view to the green as he moves up the fairway

serves several purposes: Obviously, it adds to the beauty of the green, if the correct shape of tree, or trees, are used. Also, by adding a forward framing element in front of the green, the edge of the fairway can be brought into the green traps in a gentle curve, adding definition to the green and the approach to the green. Also the green approach can be somewhat "toughened up" by careful placing of these trees.

#### No place for engineering practice

A great deal of experience with, and knowledge of trees, plus the game of golf, becomes necessary at this point. Just to stick a pin in the center of the green and then take an instrument and swing an arc behind and to the sides of the green, so one can then plant a row of trees on this arc, is to invite the worst kind of golf course landscape design. This is where the art of creating a landscape composition must come into play, so that the end result will not look crowded and unnatural, but as if the landscape existed there always. (See Sketch #2 illustrating the mistake of an overly balanced planting.)

#### Know your plants

The landscape architect or designer uses plants much like the artist uses his paints. The chief difference is that the shapes on the canvas will remain the same, whereas plants in the ground will keep changing over a long period of time, as long as the trees are living. Time becomes a factor to be reckoned with in addition to color, form, texture, terrain, depth of field and even climate. The designer, by understanding all these variations, must be able to visualize the end product even before he puts his pencil to the drawing board.

#### Patience and imagination are essential

We simply cannot stop such growth processes at any given point. It is an ever changing entity even into old age. The same is true with any landscape planting. So we must know the steps through which these trees will progress. We can then know which species to select and precisely where to place them—even though to begin with they might be small. The initial effect—unless much money is available for large plants—is usually less than adequate. But even when small plants are used, an immediate effect is felt by the placement of the trees—and the promise of larger sizes to come and how it will appear.

*Part II will continue in November.*

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