

Why Not Just Cut Down All the Trees?

by Keith Pitchford, Arborist/Representative, Branches Etc., Inc.

Many times during tours with superintendents I am reminded that a golf course is grass, not trees. After all, I'm told, it's not an arboretum. You certainly couldn't convince me of that when I was a teenager playing golf in New England. For me, golf was trees and rolling green hills.

Without doubt, my profession as forester and arborist is due in large part to those early days on the golf course. So for me, a golf course is an arboretum. Every time I tour a course I am surprised that more attention isn't given to the trees. After all, trees play a major role in determining the difficulty of a golf course, not to mention their aesthetic value. Therefore, it's high time that superintendents learn a bit about tree care. Here's a little primer to get you started.

First, each tree is different. Envision each tree being as different as human beings. Trees come in many species, and within those species are individuals whose differences are based on environmental factors. How did they get there?

Have they always lived here, or were they relocated to this spot? Have their immediate surroundings recently changed? Are they in the best location to keep them healthy? All of these questions determine what to expect from your golf course trees. The answers dictate how to care for them. Trees are almost as diverse as humans, so hire a well-qualified arborist who understands these differences.

Second, trees comprise part of your golf course "ecosystem." As superintendents you manage your property to maintain a stable environment. Because environmental systems are "fixed" systems, each operation you undertake on the course will impact another. For example, you work hard to keep the turf in perfect shape. However, what you do to ensure this carpet of grass may affect the health of your trees.

Several examples come to mind. Last winter I thinned a large stand of trees separating two putting greens. The superintendent needed to increase the drying capability of the greens. By all accounts the job went quite well. My only concern was the effect this drastic thinning will have on the remaining trees. Will some trees experience sun scald and die? Will some fall over due to increased

wind flow? What kind of undergrowth will occur now that more sun is reaching the forest floor? Is this the kind of undergrowth that will require increased labor to control? Have we endangered the understory ornamental plants like dogwoods and azaleas, and exposed them to insect damage? I asked myself whether we solved one problem and created others.

Second, is the impact of fertilizers on trees along fairways. I envision the large amounts of turf nitrogen-rich fertilizers applied yearly. Trees love nitrogen; like dogs with too much food, they will continue feeding as long as food is there. Not only do they get the fertilizers applied to the turf, but in the fall, they receive additional nitrogen from decaying leaves.

The problem is, too much is a bad thing. Excess nitrogen in a tree's system can have several effects. One effect is the attraction of sucking insects such as scales and aphids which are drawn to these trees because of the excessive "juices" flowing through them. This is especially true of eastern white pines, oaks and elms. These sucking insects ultimately weaken the tree and leave them vulnerable to highly damaging "secondary" insects such as wood bores, pine beetles and elm bark

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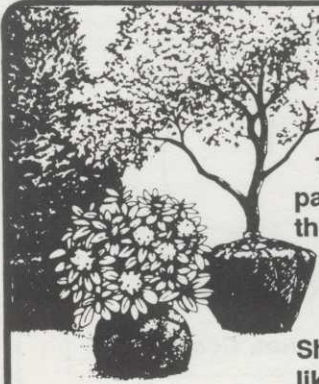
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John Deer Tourney Results

On October 8, one of the John Deere Regional Team Championship Tournaments was held at Wakefield Valley GC in Westminster.

First Place was determined by a chip-off. All four team members chipped.

1st Place - Glade Valley Golf Club with 31'0"; Superintendent Chad Lamantia

2nd Place - Eisenhower Golf Club with 33'2"; Superintendent Lou Rudinski

3rd Place - Piney Branch Golf Club with 42'2"; Superintendent Gene Dyke.

Glade Valley qualifies for John Deere's National Championship in Palm Springs, Calif., Nov. 18-22.

John Deere will donate 10% of the entry fees to the MAAGCS and \$10 per team to the GCSAA Scholarship Research Fund.

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beetles. The resulting dead trees can be very expensive to remove.

A second impact of excessive nitrogen can be the imbalance of the tree's biological system. A tree is a highly organized and balanced system. It produces enough starch, or "food," each year to carry out four distinct and equal functions: growing leaves, flower production, adding new wood, and defense against insects and disease. If a tree is "pumped up" with excessive nitrogen the entire growth process is exaggerated. Leaves are larger, as are flowers, and more wood is added than normal. The irony is that in the end there is less energy available to fend off insects and disease. Therefore, in some cases, additional nitrogen can actually lead to a tree's demise. Again, dead trees are expensive to remove.

So you see, a golf course is not just turf. Most of the activities you undertake to manage the turf can impact your trees. But, don't be frustrated and clear cut the course.

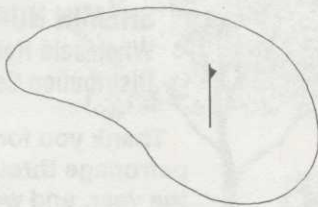
The fact is that trees are an extremely important component of your course. Ask your members for their opinions—I'm sure they would agree. My point is, form a working relationship with an arborist who understands the detailed interactions of your golf course "system." It will save you a lot of money in the long run.

We Remember

The MAAGCS notes the passing of Thomas Lafalce, one of our student members and Assistant Superintendent of Mount Vernon Country Club, on October 27. Tom was studying at the Institute of Applied Agriculture with the dream of becoming a superintendent. Tom was a fine gentleman who will be missed by all. A scholarship fund is being formed in Tom's name. If you wish to contribute, contact Jeff Michel, 703-780-9346.

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Best wishes for good health
and success in 1993.