

GOLF COURSES--OUR FUTURE PARKS?

Virginia DeArmand

Peppergrove Perennials, Lapeer, MI

Golf courses have a special place in my heart despite my never having played a game of golf or clearly understanding how the game is played. One need not be a golfer to appreciate the esthetic value that golf courses provide for communities.

With increasing construction demands placed on our urban and suburban areas, the value of golf courses as oases in islands of concrete become even greater. Golf courses can and should exemplify not only the ability to challenge the golfer's game but also to soothe and refresh his spirit.

The horticultural staff of the golf links have a unique opportunity to surround their customers with environmental beauty. What an exciting challenge, but also a tremendous amount of work! So many golf courses have already tackled this challenge and produced beautiful greens, mature specimen trees and bright splashes of annual color. But many more opportunities exist for incorporating different plant materials such as herbaceous perennials. Today I want to sell you on the idea of what perennials can do to help beautify the golf course and maybe help solve some maintenance and planting problems.

Perennials can be a marvelous tool to add interest and color in planting beds. Many golf courses currently do a fine job with annuals for seasonal color but adding perennials can expand your season of color and also minimize costly annual replanting. Perennials versatility offer exciting landscape opportunities and this versatility is never more evident when searching for plants to thrive in those "difficult to grow anything" areas. As a group, herbaceous perennials are without rival. No matter how sunny, shady, dry or wet the exposure, there is a perennial that will tolerate the environment condition.

Plantings should always be done with a purpose in mind. On golf courses this purpose might be to direct traffic, define space or create and emphasize views. Also plantings may exist to maintain and stabilize hills and slopes; define and enhance water hazards; to beautify and minimize maintenance of roughs; and also for the sole purpose of delighting the eye. Turf areas provide perfect foils for the magnificent variety of colors and textures in carefully planned perennial beds. With increasing concern of high fertilizer and pesticide requiring plants, such as turf, perennials can also be used to reduce some of the unneeded grassy areas around fairways and consequently reduce some of the chemical applications.

Perennials are exciting because they are dyanmic-ever changing. They provide color, movement and interest in the landscape and yet their size is constant and their limits defined. They provide color from early spring with newly emerging foliage through the winter with snow covered dried flowers and seed pods. My philosophy in garden design is that the dominant feature is change. Each time you see the landscape, you should see only part of a yearly cycle. There is always something happening. Plantings of perennials should provide movement from season to season with variation in scale, color, and

volume. In a golf course setting where space tends to be large, perennial plantings should be done in large blocks of the same variety to emphasize the space and make the seasonal display more dramatic. If planned correctly this also provides for reduced maintenance.

All gardens should surprise, allowing discovery, creating an alluring aura of mystery. Why should golf courses be any different? With such tremendous acreage available and with a captive audience of golfers, why not have an inspired landscape? If your choices are one of harnessing nature to hallmark the passing seasons with the beauty and diversity of perennials to one of unlimited lawns with a few trees, why not choose the former?

Let's look at some of the uses where perennials can most effectively be used in and around golf courses:

- 1) Erosion control; bank stabilization
- 2) To enhance water areas and rough areas
- 3) Direct traffic and define traffic patterns
- 4) Define space and emphasize views
- 5) Reduce grassy areas to minimize maintenance and use of chemicals
- 6) Beautification