

Naturalizing Rough Areas With Wildflowers

Gator Creek Golf Club
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Issue

Environmental responsibility is an important goal at golf facilities. Many golf course superintendents already strive to maintain turf in a way that protects and improves the environment, but the search continues for new ways to improve the golf experience while remaining economically and environmentally sustainable. At Gator Creek Golf Club in Sarasota, Florida, converting turfgrass areas to wildflowers is one way the club is trying to tie all of these goals together.

Action

The process begins by identifying areas that receive little play and would be good candidates for conversion to wildflowers. Good examples are the roughs around tees, along out-of-play lake banks and in the transitional areas between holes. The turf is sprayed with a non-selective herbicide, scalped, aerated and planted with a Gulf Coast blend of wildflower seeds that perform well in the area. Planting occurs towards the end of the rainy season in early to middle September. They are able to get nine months of color from these wildflower areas before they must be mown and reseeded for the following year.

Results

Over the past three years, the wildflower planting program at Gator Creek has been very successful. Some of the benefits include:

1. Wildflowers add color and frame the golf course without requiring the continual maintenance of formal flower beds.
2. Wildflower areas do not need regular mowing, fertilization or pesticide treatments.
3. Wildflower areas serve as a visual buffer and improve views.
4. Wildflower areas provide valuable habitat for pollinators like bees and butterflies. They also act as great wildlife corridors.

It is important to note that converting areas to wildflowers is not an exact science and requires some trial and error. Superintendent Michael O'Bryant recommends trying a few small areas first to see which seed blends and planting times work best. He estimates that the wildflower areas are budget neutral, but a great improvement over normal turf maintenance in a rough

area. The cost lies mostly in purchasing seed, with some additional costs in preparing an area for planting. Over three years, Gator Creek has converted two acres of irrigated turf and one acre of pine straw to wildflowers. The project has been well received by golfers and the club plans to convert another acre in the fall.



Converting maintained turf to wildflowers is an excellent way to improve the environmental quality of the golf course and reduce irrigation.