

## Reducing Inputs By Converting Turf To Native Grasses

**Rivermont Golf Club**  
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### Issue

Budget reductions at Rivermont Golf Club placed a strain on the golf course maintenance operation. Superintendent Mark Hoban recognized that they could not afford the same amount of highly maintained turf with the reduced maintenance budget. Labor and other inputs had to be focused down the middle of the golf course, with fewer resources dedicated to maintaining out-of-play areas.

### Action

The opportunity to improve the situation came during a golf course redesign. Hoban showed the owners at Rivermont how he had used native areas to save resources at his previous position. Once the owners saw the potential benefits, they asked the golf course architect to incorporate turf reduction and native areas into the new design.



*Converting out-of-play areas to native grasses has saved money and allowed more resources to be focused on the primary playing areas.*

Out-of-play areas around tees and behind greens were identified for conversion to native grasses. The native seed blend was a mixture of tall fescue and broomsedge that would not require irrigation, mowing or pesticides after establishment. Once the native grasses were established, irrigation heads were either adjusted or turned off to ensure that the native areas received no supplemental irrigation. In total, 25 acres of highly maintained turfgrass were converted to native areas.

## **Results**

Converting a substantial area to native grasses has allowed more resources to be focused on the primary playing areas. Cost savings have been estimated at \$50,000 to \$80,000 annually because the only maintenance required in the new native areas is periodic removal of small trees and large broadleaf weeds.

The native areas have created a unique aesthetic at Rivermont, framing the holes and providing visual accents. The native grasses also change color throughout the year, adding aesthetic variety to the golf course. In addition, the native areas attract an assortment of birds, butterflies and animals to the course. This enhances the environmental value of the property and golfers enjoy seeing the wildlife. The native areas also help control erosion on the property and act as a natural buffer before runoff enters the nearby Chattahoochee River.

Managing expectations has been one of the project's biggest challenges. Native area conversion is a long-term endeavor and it takes several years for the native areas to fully mature. At first, the native areas were comprised mostly of tall fescue. Over time, however, populations of the desired broomsedge increased and the native areas developed a more varied and mature look. Harvesting and planting native seeds helps accelerate the maturation process, as does incorporating some native plants into these areas.

The initial native area conversions at Rivermont Golf Club were so successful that more native areas are being added. The sizable turf reduction allows the maintenance staff to mow all the rough at Rivermont in a single day.