



Root development for application of Verti-Mulch

A one, two, tree

DAVID WHITE considers the effects of the mini-industry in donated trees to golf courses and suggests a three-point guide to their maintenance

Almost as popular as the perennial teak bench-seat, more and more greenkeepers are receiving donated young trees or saplings – given to the Club in memory of a deceased member who found pleasure on God-given golfing grounds – or finances from a widow to purchase a tree which the donor hopes will flourish in perpetuity.

Casting a watchful eye over the growth of this almost inevitable mini-industry, especially in south and south western retirement towns, it seems to me that there is danger lurking from at least three sides.

To begin, whilst varietal choice is often an emotive one – “dear old Marmaduke so much enjoyed the beauty of the willow” – the wise greenkeeper will attempt to bring influence upon the final variety of tree actually planted, based on his own local knowledge or perhaps guidance from an arboriculturist. After all, a pretty willow planted a few yards from the back of a green may look grand for a year or two, but as the roots begin to infiltrate the putting surface, Marmaduke’s memorial will become a vastly expensive folly and the object of blasphemy.

Second, the positioning of any tree is of paramount importance and great thought should be taken before deciding on a final site. In considering shadows look to the sun for guidance, always remembering (forgive the hackneyed phrase) that big oaks from little acorns grow, and be vigilant in ensuring that the little sapling being planted isn’t going to

cause future generations of golfers a high degree of heartache. Placement to the sides and rear of greens may seem a smart idea at the time, but flow of air and restriction of natural light can play merry havoc with the health of a putting surface. Planting trees in properly spaced clusters, to the right side of an open fairway if the contours and sun permit, seems to me a bonny way of breaking the monotony of those often boring straight out and back holes, together with providing an added hazard for the chronic slicer. Try always to think naturally when planting, bearing in mind that trees don’t grow in uniform lines, except on French roadsides!

Third, and most important of all, it is vital during the formative two or three year period of growth and development to ensure that a correct programme of maintenance is carried out. Rather like the golf course itself, young trees will prosper if care is taken and get very sickly if neglected. Imagine if you will a golf course untouched for a month – is the picture of horror imprinted in your mind? – so it is with young trees.

To begin, check all small trees during their first weeks in the earth. Ensure they are firmly implanted and carefully tread them in to keep the soil firm. Stems should be upright and although trees grow better without stakes, staking may be necessary – indeed almost obligatory – if we are to prevent errant golfers from hacking the youngsters to death! At the beginning the young tree will have been given its own little patch of ground, free from weeds and grass. Keep



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guide to arboriculture

it that way! Trees growing amongst weeds find it tougher to extract moisture than those on bare soil and it is of immense benefit to remove all grass and weed growth over an area of at least one square metre. Dense grass, particularly short mown grass, is particularly harmful and will substantially reduce growth in formative years.

Mulching conserves moisture for the tree by suppressing weed growth, at the same time keeping the ground surface cool. Organic materials such as leaf mould, straw, bark or compost have much to commend them as their gradual breakdown will fertilise the soil. Avoid very fine grades of peat and especially lawn clippings as these invariably interfere with the transit of air and water into the soil. The use of clear polythene sheeting, tree mats or old fertiliser bags (print side down please), held in place with stones or soil, can also be utilised as mulch.

How much water do young trees need? Except in drought conditions, not much is the answer, especially if they are mulch covered. As they grow and become larger, a thorough weekly soil soaking during any dry period will however be beneficial.

I can hear the howls of protest from those whose working day just isn't long enough and for whom new trees may well be just another headache to take on board. Take heart, for once planted, competition for water, light and nutrients amongst saplings can be very effectively controlled by the careful and diligent use of herbicides, such as Roundup PRO, which contain glyphosate. This is absorbed by weed and grass leaves and moves through the entire plant whilst remaining inactive in the soil and does not affect tree growth through roots. It can be effective on even the most stubborn of weeds, including brambles and bracken, though care should be taken to avoid applying herbicide to the tree itself.

A word or two on pruning, it being considered prudent to remove unwanted branches before they reach a thickness of two inches. Such action, whilst often looked upon as drastic on such tender life, lessens the risk of decay entering the plant. Remove one shoot if a double leader is growing, also dead or crossing branches. Remembering the height of a golf swing, keep lower branches clear but don't exceed one third of the total height of the tree.

If your course already has trees which have suffered from stress and look set to die, consider the possible use of the innovative 'Verti-Mulch', common in the States and now available in the UK. The principle is to bore six holes around the drip line of the tree about 40cm in depth with a 6cm diameter. The majority of the bore hole is then filled with 'Verti-Mulch' and topped with sand. Water filters through the sand to the additive, which draws water like a sponge and provides nutrients to the stressed root system.

Finally, consider the option which tree surgeon Keith Banyard of Witchampton in Dorset took, that of transplanting local species of semi-mature white birch and English Oak trees to the Wareham course from a nearby estate. Experienced in handling such conservationist projects, he utilised a Vermeer TS 50 Tree Spade mounted on a tractor, which required only one person for the whole operation. The spade controlled the size of hole when removing the tree and caused little or no damage to the turf. The transformation was amazing, with more adventurous holes in play in no time.



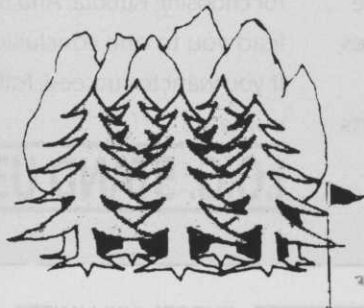
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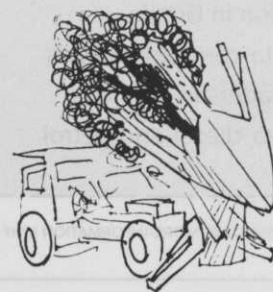
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