



LANDSCAPING: *A CLOSER LOOK*

The **Allure** of **Landscaping**

Planning is the most important part of the landscaping process. Good planning can ensure that no effort is spent on unnecessary steps, money is spent wisely and time is used to maximum effect.

Available space and where the sun rises and sets, need to be considered in order for plants and trees to be planted in places that will best serve the golf course and cater for the members needs. For example, tees can be all shapes and sizes but whatever the shape, the main consideration is if they withstand the everyday wear and tear - No golfer wants to play from a tee where there is hardly a blade of grass and the surface is uneven.

This supplement looks at how to use landscaping to its full potential on a golf course and shows us the latest products the industry has to offer. Melissa Toombs talks with Freelance Writer and Gardening Broadcaster, Steve Bradley, who offers advice and helpful hints to incorporate into your landscaping routine. She also quizzes greenkeepers across Britain and abroad on how they go about landscaping their own golf courses.

Steve Bradley (known as Brad) is Gardening Correspondent for The Sun, a Freelance Writer and Broadcaster, and is expert on all things horticulture. Melissa Toombs sought his advice on landscaping a golf course.



1. Which areas on a golf course do you feel benefit the most from landscaping?

"I think around the clubhouse, it's important to make a first impression at any golf course. Having said that, I'm not a golfer so I dare say that someone who plays pays more attention to the course than the clubhouse, but the grounds around the clubhouse do give a very important first impression."

2. How can we make landscaping as maintenance friendly as possible?

"I think that mulches will become more and more prominent because if I was the Course Manager, I'd want to use anything possible to keep the greens in good condition."

3. What aesthetic values should a landscape incorporate?

"All year round colour, or all year round interest so that whenever anybody turns up at whatever time of day or whatever time of year, there should always be something that looks nice around the entrance to the clubhouse."

4. How do you think clubs can enhance their appearance further for special events throughout the year?

"I think what I would do, would be to have a framework of easy to maintain shrubs around the clubhouse and then when it came to the special day, I would go to town on the bedding. You can buy stuff in which is in flower or is just about to flower, and ok, it may cost a little bit more, but it's one less headache for the groundstaff. You know it will look good on the day."

5. How important do you think it is that a club invests in a greenhouse to bring plants on before they take them outside?

"I must admit that with regards to the bedding I have just mentioned, I wouldn't bother, but I would tend to have a greenhouse or conservatory where I could have indoor plants for use in the clubhouse and restaurant. I see that as the primary function for it rather than raising your own bedding. There are specialists that can do that for you and you can buy it relatively cheaply, whereas the house plants always make a good impression inside and these are the plants that have to deal with the various different light levels."

6. How can you remodel a course with minimum disruption?

"Again, I think the use of bedding. Colour always attracts the eye and even something like a simple raised bed, it can literally be dropped down within a couple of hours and filled and the plants put in, and it makes a very easy, immediate impact and can be put away again for next time."

7. Do you agree that sustainable landscapes reflect a high level of self-sufficiency?

"Yes, to a certain extent. You want it to be easy to maintain and not to have a great environmental impact on the area, but I think that in the main, most golf courses are better than many other areas. They've got their own water features – ok, they are designed to make life a bit more challenging for the golfer, but a lot of them, the way they have got their own water systems, their own areas for catching water and excellent drainage facilities, I think most golf courses are better than many other areas anyway."

8. What type of drainage should be used when constructing beds?

"I think that we have got to look at something else, I mean we almost want a system now where we can catch water rather than get it away. I reckon that through the summer, because the workload is so great and the climate is changing, when creating beds or raised beds, you almost want the water to be held there for as long as possible without water logging. You want these areas to look after themselves so that you can get on with something else. I think it's actually looking at systems of retaining water rather than draining it. We have always looked at drainage in the past, as water has not been an issue. I've been doing some work with people where the containers have holes in them about four inches up the sides. The idea being that when you water those plants, you know that they have that reservoir at the bottom that they can tap in to - So you can get away with watering say every third day in hot weather, rather than having to water them every single day."

9. Does plant placement and selection play an important part in achieving a good landscape? What plant selection criterion needs to be considered?

"Yes and I must admit that in terms of using broadly dugger greens to restrict a view or make a golf course more challenging is an excellent idea, but I do like the idea where they name a hole after the shrubs planted prominently close-by. I think at certain times of the year where you've got holes on the course dopped and stems and that sort of thing. I think it gives a course an identity and a good use of landscape rather than just being "a new hole".

10. Is there certain criterion that you look for when selecting the plants?

"Basically something that will look after itself. If you bear in mind that the guys that work at a golf course - their primary job is to make sure that the grass is in excellent condition and the playing surface remains good at all times - it makes their life a lot easier if they have plants that are self sufficient. Things that don't need a lot of spraying or pruning, don't need an awful lot of tidying up, they are there, they look good but they just look after themselves."

11. We always see Augusta with its rhododendrons and azaleas in April but surely these aren't necessarily good for certain areas of golf courses?

"Well a big problem with something like rhododendrons and azaleas as a group of plants, is that you've got to have the right soil. They are ericaceous plants and they thrive in acidic soil, which is not all that common in vast areas of the UK, but then again you can soon find alternatives like elaeagnus and different types of laurels and pyracanthas. With something like a rhododendron, they flower once and then that's it 'til next year, whereas if you get something like a pyracantha you've got the flowers on and you've got the berries on. I see one or two places where they've actually had sweet peas growing underneath the pyracanthas so they use them as a climbing frame and scramble up them - You've got flowers early on and berries later, with sweet peas in the middle of the year."



12. What factors need to be considered before installing a pond?

“Any water feature on a golf course has got to have several purposes. There’s the playing side of it in terms of making the course more challenging but I also think it has to be placed somewhere where it can collect water and reuse it. More and more as we have to start to face these water problems, its primary function has got to be water catchment.”

13. What environmental values need to be taken into account before designing a landscape?

“For a start you have got to have something that will fit in with the surroundings. For example, if you try having rhododendron in an area like Lincolnshire where the soil is quite chalky, you add to your problems straight away, as you have got to try and make something work and grow where it normally wouldn’t. A lot of the time you look at what the native vegetations are, for instance – if you notice say that a farmer’s hedges have got hawthorn in and your going to be planting trees there, why not plant some that are part of the hawthorn family. Pick on plants that you know are doing well in either the local gardens, round about, or in the fields – work with nature rather than trying to fight it every inch of the way.”

14. What kind of constraints would you normally come across and would they generally quite easy to work around?

“In terms of golf, you have nearly always got to do quite a lot of earth moving. A lot of it at golf courses these days, I see it bordering on civil engineering - the contours of the land and such like. I often see the soil type as a major problem – a heavy soil, easily damaged by machinery and compaction. If you can get the soil right, it makes life easy. In terms of solving these problems, if you have skilled contractors it’s usually not a problem but again it’s getting them to get it right to start with so the next stages are much easier, such as creating the greens, getting the fairways right, getting the drainage and everything else sorted out.”

15. What are some of the common mistakes made by enthusiastic amateurs when it comes to producing ornamental areas?

“They tend to over plant – they’ll put in far too many plants. You can see why they do it, to suppress the weeds etc but after a few years you need to start taking plants out and they tend to forget about that. They over plant to start with, they have a shrub board which you would expect to last 10 to 15 years before it needs major work, but after five years it’s so overcrowded

you’ve got to sort it out because they didn’t thin out the plants after the third year. Also they will tend to pick a lot of wrong rock and plant combinations in terms of they’ll probably want things in there like Iverson, which thrives on the chalky soil and a rhododendron next to it. Well, it doesn’t work like that, they’ve both got completely different requirements – one likes bright sunshine and the rhododendron likes dappled shade – so really it’s a lack of research. People love Japanese Maples, but they won’t stand bright sunlight or wind exposure because the leaves are so thin and they spend most of the year with shrivelled up leaves struggling against the wind.”

16. If people want to improve their landscaping skills how should they go about it?

“Places like Askham Bryan have an excellent reputation in landscaping. Myerscough and Cannington also do landscaping and design courses, as does Writtle College.”



17. Do you think there is much existing crossover knowledge between greenkeepers and horticulturalists?

"I don't really. I think the problem's been in the past that horticulturalists have just thought, oh that's grass. That's the green stuff we plant all the stuff around to make it look pretty. I think it's only because of the American influence and the influence of people like Nick Bissett and George Shiels in the UK over the last few years, that have made people realise that golf course construction, maintenance, and particularly greenkeeping, are a skill in their own right. I see it now as a branch of horticulture rather than just someone who looks after the grass. It used to be this attitude that the local authorities said, oh anyone can mow a bit of grass, and grounds maintenance is very specialist these days and extremely science based."

18. Do you think it is important to have a person dedicated to the gardening needs of a golf club, or is it better for the jobs to be shared around?

"Again I think it's a specialist thing. Depending on the size of the golf club, I reckon you would probably be able to justify one person, two or three days a week, to look after the garden (non-play) areas around the clubhouse but I'd also include in that what I would call interior landscape, the plants that are in the restaurant and proshop etc. "

19. What would be an average budget for landscaping an 18 hole course?

"I've got no idea but I wouldn't want to pay the bill!"

20. What about the landscaping across car park areas?

"Now what they are trying to do is have cars parked in clusters of maybe six or seven, often with trees shading them, and they're looking more and more at areas where they have got down this mesh that the grass can grow through and you can park on that rather than great big areas of tarmac that look like their outside Asda's or Tesco's.

"The boutique layout consists of clusters or parking spaces – up to a dozen – with maybe one or two trees. They break them up into little areas like that so that quite often, if there are hardly any cars there, from a distance it looks like it's part of the course rather than the car park – it blends in and it meets a lot of the environmental criteria as well."

Brad's Helpful Hints

- Plan out a programme
- Try not to do everything yourself - get contractors in to help where necessary
- Incorporate as many low maintenance plants into your scheme as possible – especially drought tolerant plants
- Incorporate the car park into the course design where possible
- Incorporate as many trees as possible into your scheme – these are handy for shading cars and encouraging al fresco dining
- Mobile displays – raised beds can be used year after year
- Change your bedding two or three times a year
- Try to use as many multi-purpose plants as possible – i.e. plants that flower then have berries, and can be used in combination with various other plants

Aberdeen is a perfect example of how creative landscaping and gardening can improve the appeal of an area.

Aberdeen won the Best City category for Britain in Bloom 2006 and was awarded a Gold Medal.

"An outstanding combination of brilliant bedding and floral displays, wonderful trees, parks and borders and numerous lovely gardens and commercial displays. The countryside areas were well-used and well-managed and the community were clearly involved in the decision-making and active hands-on management of many features and facilities in this vibrant city," were just some of the reasons the judges gave, as to why Aberdeen deserved this prestigious award.

