

# Grow wild on the golf course...

## *and put the habitat back*



Linda Laxton offers a guide of what to plant where, when to plant it and the benefits that different species bring

**Not so many years ago, golf courses were being attacked by ecologists as un-natural, profit obsessed, elitist wastes of green space that were endangering our natural habitats and threatening the environment with the use of unnecessary chemicals.**

Since then common sense has tempered that view, aided by greenkeepers' positive attitudes to preserving wildlife and the industry's general move towards sustainability (where possible) and away from the practise of applying products in isolation, regardless of the existing soil make-up. Greenkeepers' love of nature goes without saying and goes with the job, so whether you're looking to simply encourage biodiversity in the rough or go the whole hog with

a grey water filtering system.

If I were planning to bring biodiversity to the golf course I'd start with the rough and semi-rough as they're the biggest possible areas of wildlife habitat, and I'd recommend quite robust plants that will stand golfers tramping around trying to find their balls!

**Parkland/Inland Courses.**

For parkland and most inland courses Knapweeds, Oxeye Daisies, Hedge Woundwort, Rosebay Willowherb, Dandelions and Buttercups will all do the job, with Foxgloves, English Bluebells, Primroses and Red Campions for shady areas. All you need to do is just clear small spaces and put them in any time from October to March. They don't

need any looking after, they will seed themselves and attract between them; Bumble Bees (Foxglove), Elephant Hawk Moths (Rosebay Willowherb) the Rosy Rustic Moth (Hedge Woundwort) and the Plain Y Moth. The larvae of the Campion Moth that lives in the Red Campion's seed heads is a valuable food source for Blue Tits and Knapweed provides nectar for bees and butterflies, while Greenfinches eat the seed. As primroses are pollinated at night they provide food for a variety of moths.

**Links Courses.**

Links courses will also happily play host to Harebells, Red and White Clover, Stonecrop, Marram Grass, Sea Couch Grass, Dune



MAIN ABOVE: A reedbed  
INSET: A bee on a knapweed  
ABOVE: Red campion



## WILD FLOWER CALENDAR

### January/February

– Coltsfoot

### March/April

– Dog Violets, Primroses, Red Campion

### May/June

– Dandelions, Buttercups, Daisies

### July/Aug

– Knapweed, Oxeye Daisies, Clovers, Vetches, Birds foot Trefoil

### September/October

– Hedge Woundwort, Lesser Burdock, Angelica

### November/December

– Guelder Rose, Wild Clematis, Wild Privet, Woody Nightshade.



ABOVE: A cricket lands in the rough.  
BELOW: Sea campion.  
BOTTOM: Harebell



Fescue, Vipers Bugloss, Slender Birdsfoot and Trefoil, loved by the *Bombus subterraneus*, endangered and almost extinct bumble bee. Sheep's bit, Scabious and Sea Campion will also do well. For the three butterfly species that migrate to these shores from the Mediterranean, the Tortoiseshell, the Peacock and the Painted Lady, these plants provide the first nectar break after their long journey.

### Heathland Courses

The wild flowers mentioned for general inland golf courses will survive on Heathland courses but due to the acidity of the soil there are others that will do better. Sheep's Sorrel which is the larval food plant of the Small Copper Butterfly, Harebells, Thyme and Tormentil, Gorse and Heather, which has its own special maintenance programme and is adored by bees. Meadow Pippets, Grouse and various Fritillary Butterflies love these plants.

### Lakes, Ponds, Streams and Water Hazards.

If golfers are likely to be wading in to collect stray golf balls I would keep away from plants like Water lilies that could get damaged. This situation needs spiky plants that are planted, around the edge of the water. Marginals including Reeds, Irises, Ragged Robin, Purple Loosestrife, Marsh Marigolds and Bulrushes, once established will encourage dragonflies, newts, water voles, frogs and toads, and can be planted from October to March. Water Soldiers float in summer and

then sink to the bottom of the pond and live in the mud over winter. They should be 'golfer' proof but need to be planted in the spring when the water has heated up.

### Grey Water Filtering

Many of our water loving marginal plants will recycle grey water from the clubhouse caused by washing-up, washing machines and showers, which you can safely re-use for irrigation.

Grey water needs to pass through plants of three different densities so you either need a long narrow pond (like a brook) or three smaller connecting ponds. Build settlement beds of re-cycled materials – crushed glass will last 10 years – and plant into it. Section one, or your first pond should contain reeds which have a good root mat and act as a physical filter. Section two should have Yellow Flag Irises, Marsh Marigolds and Bulrushes, while the third and last section needs sedges and floating plants for oxygenation.

The Lesser or Greater Pond Sedge will effectively pull anything that's left, detergent for example, out of the water and you will be able to safely re-use it for irrigation."

Golf courses are 'managed', but then so are the 'wild' heath lands of the North Yorkshire Moors and every back garden in the land. That doesn't stop them becoming important havens of biodiversity and by providing the right food source you can attract even the most endangered species and help secure their survival. As Linda Laxton says "Golf courses offer an ideal opportunity to put the habitat back."



### about the author

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Don't miss Linda's Free Fringe Seminar "Green Up Your Greens" at 12.55 – 1.25 on Wednesday January 19 during Harrogate Week.