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## An Architect's Opinion Contour Mowing for Playability — And It's Worth It

by Bob Lohmann

Modern equipment utilization, unmaintained out-of-play areas, overgrooming is overspending, the natural look, native areas; these are all phases of the 80s that everyone is saying and hearing. But let's not forget the elementary rules that a golf course must obey as stated by Bobby Jones over 45 years ago: "The first purpose of any golf course should be to give pleasure, and that to the greatest number of players ... because it will offer problems a person may attempt according to their ability. It will never become hopeless for the duffer nor fail to concern and interest the expert."

The typical club membership includes players of a wide range of abilities. It must serve men, women, seniors, juniors, beginners, duffers, bogey and scratch. For this reason, playability of a golf course is very important and should be reviewed constantly by the superintendent, professional, and greens committee. Playability can be created or improved by the inexpensive practice of establishing new mowing patterns, not by rebuilding the entire golf course, as many people believe. Playability is the combination of flexibility, fairness, difficulty, distinction, accuracy, finesse, challenge and shot value.

Most American country club members will not accept a completely natural golf course on a daily basis. But on the other hand, the golfer has become educated to the point where he realizes that the wide, long, straight-lined fairways present on many golf courses today are out of date, unimaginative, and overly expensive to maintain. Most golfers are willing to accept the target golf concept as long as it is not a do-or-die situation, and it adds to the strategic playing interest and eye appeal of the golf course.

Many golf course fairways are overmaintained, not in quality, but in quantity. In some cases, if the latter were decreased, the savings could be applied toward the former in either increased or alternative maintenance procedures such as lightweight mowing or chemical applications.

The fairway is more than an open area that receives your golf shots. It is the target area designed to specific widths and depths in order to serve golfers of various abilities. The rough adjacent to the fairways should be maintained so the golfer can find his ball, yet not necessarily have an ideal lie.

Reducing the amounts of highly manicured fairway also reduces the water, chemicals, fertilizers, and manpower and equipment hours needed, saving hundreds of dollars per acre. Along with the maintenance savings, the golf course can stress strategic design principles and aesthetics by establishing specific target areas based on the various tee placements, terrain of the land, and the golfers' shot-making abilities.

Beginning in spring, when the grass is beginning to grow, the new fairway outlines should be established to conform to the terrain of the land and any existing or proposed tree plantings or hazards. Depending on the circumstances, this procedure might have to be completed in the fall. In either case, the golf course must be allowed to mature into its new look as the season progresses. The target areas can start as far as 150 yards from the middle tees and decrease in width and depth as they advance to the landing areas of the scratch golfer. The

(cont'd. pg. 7)

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(Contour Mowing cont'd.)

average width of the fairway can vary from 30 to 50 yards based on the skill of the golfer hitting to each specific area.

When a club decides to revise its mowing patterns, it needs to inform and educate its members and introduce the changes slowly. The golfers' scores will no doubt go up, but the golf course will become more delightful for all classes of golfers as it is studied and played.

*Editor's note: A native of Wisconsin, Bob Lohmann received a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from the University of Wisconsin — Madison in 1974. His experience both on the drawing board and in the field are indicative of his qualifications as a golf course planner. Mr. Lohmann has been actively involved in designing, building and remodeling golf courses for the past ten years. He is a registered Landscape Architect and a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and the American Society of Landscape Architects.*

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## Pruning is a Wintertime Garden Chore

Mid-winter is an excellent time for pruning trees and shrubs. There are some real advantages to pruning during winter. Plants are dormant so there is no bleeding. There is less likelihood of disease transmission. The deciduous plants are bare so the branching can easily be seen.

First a word of caution. Spring flowering shrubs and trees have already set flower buds. Any pruning on these plants should be restricted to repair so that flowers are not sacrificed.

Inspect your plants to develop a plan. Note the natural shape of the plants. This shape should be preserved during the pruning. Look for broken branches, branches which cross each other, and overgrown stems.

Prune multi-stem trees to keep the center open and prevent smaller stems from being crowded out by a larger stem. Try to select and maintain several well spaced branches of similar size. Remove branches growing into the center on the tree and crossing other branches, and bottom suckers.

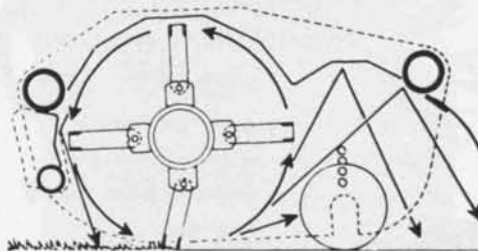
Large trees present a special problem and pruning should be restricted to removal of broken branches. Contrary to popular opinion, severe pruning is not necessary for a tree and may actually be quite harmful. In any case, major pruning of large trees is dangerous and should be left to professional arborists.

Pruning is an important part of the culture of ornamental plants if properly done. Don't try to overpower plants with pruning. Use judicious pruning to guide the natural growth of your plants.

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