Landscape Renovations on the Golf Course

by Randy Wahler
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I have always considered my knowledge of woody plant materials and ability to use them in landscape designs to be one of my main strengths. Little did I realize that the countless hours learning plant materials and design techniques at the University of Illinois would play such a large role in being a golf course superintendent. I was inspired by Dr. Michael Dirr and William Nelson to learn the countless varieties of plants and to be able to manipulate them to create the desired effect. Upon graduation from college, I enthusiastically used these skills on the golf course and private residential and commercial locations.

There are a number of areas on the golf course that I consider "prime targets" for landscaping. These areas would include:

TEES — The most important tee would be the first tee, the start of the golf course, Landscapes around tees should create a close, intimate feeling with the golfer. This is also an ideal location for speciman plants and flowers.

PRACTICE AREA — Landscaping is needed on the Practice Tee to separate it from the golf course, to provide protection from errant shots, and to provide shade for those hot summer days. This is also an ideal location for speciman plants and flowers.

GREEN AND BUNKER BACKDROPS — Use of larger plant materials behind bunkers and putting greens to frame and distinguish from the rest of the golf course. We generally use finer textured material that does not distract or overwhelm the green or bunker.

PONDS — Excellent opportunity to use materials indigenous to wet areas; i.e., willows, cattails, waterlilies. Perfect area for developing interesting reflections with flowers.

NATURAL, WOODED AREAS — These are good sheltered areas to use the ericaceous plants; i.e., hollies, rhododenrons, pieris, etc. Also an opportunity to use shrubs that attract birds.

ENTRANCES — Prime spot; first impression of the entire property. Good location for flowers, speciman plants, and a landscape that creates a warm, inviting atmosphere.

A few procedures have to be followd before we actually start the renovation and landscaping of a golf course area. These include a site analysis, landscape objectives, and the actual design.

Probably the most important step is the site analysis. Generally before we landscape an area on the golf course we inspect and take notes on the area for up to a year before we start the project. This analysis should include:

1. Soil and moisture conditions
2. Available sunlight
3. Existing vegetation
4. Topography
5. Effect on the game
6. Existing utilities, drainage, and irrigation lines
7. Traffic patterns

All of these factors will ultimately affect the landscape design. Ignoring one of these factors many times results in a faulty finished product.

Before starting the design, the landscape objectives must be determined. Is the main objective to control traffic or screen

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the next tee? Are we trying to highlight an area with speciman plants to blend plants with the existing environment? Frequently there are a combination of objectives that must be met. The art of designing is satisfying all of these objectives while remaining within the confinements of the site analysis. We generally find the design is simplified by meeting all of these guidelines.

The final procedure before construction is the actual design. one of the most important design principles we learned at the University of Illinois was the name, S.V. BESS. Actually these letters stood for:

SIMPLICITY — Avoiding too much variety and detail but not becoming over-repetitious.

VARIETY — The use of differing materials, shapes, forms, and colors to form various contrasts.

BALANCE — Weighing the materials equally on each side of the design using size, color, and textures.

EMPHASIS — The use of dominant materials to direct the viewer to the important areas of the design.

SEQUENCE — The orderly progression of forms, textures, colors from one side of the design to the other.

SCALE — Keeping the size of the materials used in proportion to the existing environment.

By combining these principles we are able to develop a unified design that is pleasing to the eye. A few of these concepts; i.e., simplicity and variety, balance and emphasis, are controls over each other. One principle prevents another from dominating the design.

We feel it is important to blend the design with the existing environment. The design should follow the general characteristics of the golf course. The landscaping on an older, stately country club would differ from a new, condominium-golf course development. Do not try to force an idea where it does not belong in the first place! The design should also blend well with the actual site location. Using exotic plants in a naturalized setting would be awkward and out of place.

Once we have a design concept we start with the "Block Method". Blocks are drawn representing the plant materials to scale. They are arranged according to size, leaf color, and texture. By utilizing the "S.V. BESS" design principles, the desired block arrangement is achieved.

The specified characteristics of each block will limit the choice of plants to a very few. The selection will also be limited by environmental factors; i.e., shade, soil moisture, hardiness, etc.

With this accomplished, we draw a rough design substituting plants until we find the desired product. The rough design is transferred to transparent drafting paper. The design should include:

1. A border around the outside edge
2. An identification list for plants used
3. A label box containing area, architect, scale, date

The entire design layout should be well-organized and neat. This is the "first impression" in accomplishing the landscape project. At least six blueprints are made of the design for presentation to the Board, construction guidelines, and filing the later reference.

With the design approved we are ready to start the construction. First the materials should be ordered two weeks in advance to avoid any delays. Soil preparation is of utmost impor-

tance. The topsoil should consist of six inches of black dirt. Proper drainage should be achieved by surface contouring or installing drain pipe under the planting bad. Occasionally we test the soil for nutrient deficiencies or surpluses. Where broadleaf evergreens are used the soil must be modified to meet the requirements of these plants.

Any lumber, stone or masonry construction should be completed before planting. Proper construction methods should be utilized to withstand soil heaving from winter freezing and the pressures exerted from soil backfill.

Once the plants are in, an attractive mulch can be used to protect the plant roots, conserve moisture, and decrease weed invasion. We normally use a shredded bark or wood chip material. The most important construction step is the cleanup. Plant tags should be removed, broken branches pruned, and the entire area fine-cleaned. Nothing detracts more from a landscaped area than a messy work site that has not been cleaned!

Landscaping various areas not only upgrades the appearance of the golf course but establishes member awareness of various plant materials. It has been a personal hobby from which I have attained a large amount of accomplishment and satisfaction. I consider my ability to design and landscape a valuable golf course superintendent skill.

For Sale

Used Toro Greenmaster Series 5, putting green mower. Excellent condition — price $600.00. Call or write: Edward J. Griffin, 10200 S. Oakley, Chicago, IL 60643, 312/238-6467.

A USGA Zontek Update

by Stanley J. Zontek
North-Central Director

As is becoming traditional, I am sending some thoughts on the condition of the golf courses I have seen in my travels so far this season as an agronomist for the USGA. It may be interesting to compare the problems and situations of other golf courses to your own.

After traveling my eight state region, in talking to some of our other staff agronomists, one thing is clear ... this part of the country escaped practically all forms of winterkill. This cannot be said for the Northern and central parts of Ohio and the South. In many ways, this has been one of the most difficult years ever for bermudagrass winterkill. It has been said that there is not one bermudagrass green alive in Dallas. It probably is true. The bermudagrass was killed around Christmas time following a quick drop in temperatures. If you watch golf on television, the early tour events held throughout Texas, you saw the problems they were having with bermudagrass kill. This winter injury of warm season grasses extended through southern Illinois and into Kentucky. Fortunately, zoysiagrass was not effected all that much, it was the bermudagrass.

For those golf course Superintendents the winter of 1983/1984 will go down as one of the worst ever for bermudagrass winterkill. On the other hand, Superintendents in this part of the country should remember this winter as one of the best (with the exception of Ohio) winters in recent memory.

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