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(Nature Walk cont'd.)

I was very familiar with over 50 acres of timbered ground which lay north and east of our golf course and clubhouse property. I identified five areas and had informally given them names like: Flood Plain, Timber, Meadow, Gravel Quarry and The Thicket., The names alone conjure up a variety of habitat in the imagination of any nature lover. By using topographical maps and our own local knowledge of our area, we were able to sketch out routings for a walking trail. It was presented to the board and we were given the blessings to go ahead and develop the official Nature Walk for St. Charles Country Club.

Cutting out the path was fairly easy. In fact, very little removal was required because existing deer trails were used. However, we did cut heavy brush when it was necessary to route around wet areas or to connect deer trails. Three inch markers of screeching orange color were attached to trees often enough for visual contact on the path. Most of the timbered trails are sand and needed no other treatment. A few wet areas needed some bark mulch. This is also a good trail marker. Four rest areas were cleared out and given names. Permanent benches and signs were added to make them official. They are called: Crook in the Creek, Deer Watch, Beaver Dam, and The Thicket; each have their own identifying micro ecology. A person's favorite spot might depend on their mood that day.

Having just about completed one full season of work with the Nature Walk, we can safely say that the project has been a success as well as a learning experience. We have had more (cont'd. page 26)



The Nature Walk begins in the woods just north of the clubhouse. The routing is  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a mile and can take as little as 20 minutes to enjoy.

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## Leaves, Limbs, Needles and Boughs

by Fred D. Opperman

Back in the fall we were talking about color on the golf course and now we need to talk about some spring color. Put some zip in some of those old shrub beds around the course and along the tree lines and woods if you are fortunate enough to have them. This month's selection will add that first of spring color and have members asking what is that beautiful plant. It's the good old common Redbud, Cercis canadensis.

This is a small tree that may grow to 35 feet and may get to have a trunk of 1 foot in diameter. It's crown is usually broad and flattened. This is a tree you can plant under other trees for it will tolerate shade. It should be planted along and in the tree line for a better naturalizing effect. These ornamental trees can be purchased as single stem and multi-stem plants.

Bark: Reddish-brown, separating into long plates and thin scales.

Twigs: Slender, zigzag, smooth, angular, brown; leaf scars alternate, somewhat elevated, triangular, hairy across the top, with 3 bundle traces.



Leaves: Alternate, simple; blades heart-shaped, contracted to a short point at the tip, up to 6 inches long and nearly as broad, smooth on the upper surface, smooth or with some hairs on the lower surface, without teeth along the edges; leafstalks slender, up to 5 inches long, usually smooth.



Flowers: Legumes up to 4 inches long and <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inch broad flat, smooth, brown at maturity, with several seeds.



Planting: This is a spring planted tree for our area and can be balled and burlapped. Likes rich moist soil, but will tolerate other soils.

Credit: Forest Trees of Illinois

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#### (Nature Walk cont'd.)

fun measuring distances, posting signs; like <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> and <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> mile, identifying wild flowers and birds. Now our interest is in informing users of the walk by placing additional permanent signage next to woodland trees and flowers as they come into their season. One example of identification of Poison Ivy (**Rhus radicans**) is not only educational but good safety for those not familiar with skin irritants. Wet lands, woodlands, and prairie all produce new and exciting colors all year long. Three of my favorite spring woodland flowers are: Trout Lily (**Erythronium americanum**), False Rue Anenome (**Isopyrum biternatum**), and Mayapple (**Podophyllum peltatum**). It's easy to tell the difference between a Red Oak (**Quercus rubra**) and a White Oak (**Quercus alba**) if you are a horticulturist. Our tags make it easy for future horticulturists to learn their differences.

Our excitement here is bursting as each season shows us dramatic change on the Nature Walk. It is refreshing to see positive interest like this in our golf course and club activity rather than the paranoia expressed by some groups of conservationists who claim golf course operations can cause damage to the environment. I believe programs like ours can be implemented by any golf course whose "suburban woods" offer ecology and habitat for all kinds of "fern and fauna". I perceive this project to be one that will help our golfing membership appreciate more of the work going on at the course. The nature walk concept is a wonderful public relation tool that can awaken people to the fact that the golf course is a real asset to the community. Not only will the project stimulate topics for articles in local publications and newsletters, but it will help the golf course superintendents expand their knowledge about so many things that take place around them every day and every season.



Norton Creek is just one of the features visited on the St. Charles Country Club Nature Walk. Many types of wildlife can be seen here any time of the year.



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