

New Landscape Concepts for Golf Courses

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Mexican Tabebuia, cold tolerant, winter blooming

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The horticultural consultant is the expert who is called upon for professional or technical advice. Horticulture is the art and science of growing flowers, fruits, shrubs, and trees for ornament and fancy. Incident to the growing of plants are all the questions of plant breeding, variation of plants under domestication, the bearings and applications of biological and physical sciences.

The horticultural consultant acts as a liaison between the landscape architect in the design phase and the landscape contractor in the installation phase. The horticultural consultant supplies the on-going expertise in the successful growing

of the plant material. After project completion, he assists the new owner in the early phases of critical maintenance and survival techniques. The addition of this professional to the development project staff can save thousands of dollars of dead plant material and expensive replanting costs.

Current trends in county and city governments in requiring more native plant material and the desires to have more colorful and spectacular landscapes have created a need for the horticultural consultant to work in an on-going relationship with municipal governments, land developers, and golf course superintendents. ■

As a horticultural consultant and president of David E. Wedge, Inc., a general practice consulting firm located in West Palm Beach, Florida, I have been involved in the reintroduction of flowering trees to south Florida on both state and a local level. From 1986 to 1988 I was fortunate to be one of the individuals involved in creating an environmental/landscape report for the City of West Palm Beach called Dynamic Visions. The areas in which I was most involved were the proper use of flowering trees in the landscape and the use of trees in focal areas to accomplish a specific landscape statement. Palm Beach County's proximity between Lake



West Indian Shower - one of Florida's best winter-flowering trees.

Okeechobee and the Atlantic Ocean, its prevailing 6 m.p.h. southeasterly breezes, and an average annual rainfall of 60 inches offers a climate unexcelled for the use of flowering trees in the landscape. The process of using trees and shrubs which produce a specific color at a specific time in a select location interwoven with elements of environmental landscaping, is a concept called Focal Point Design.

Each golf course superintendent usually asks the same type questions -- how can we get a more colorful landscape in the winter; how can we improve the aesthetics of the golf course and its surrounding landscape; how do we properly use flowering trees in the landscape; and which ones do we use? These are some of the major problems common not only to the golf course industry, but also to large commercial developments, institutions, and even our public park systems.

In traveling throughout Palm Beach County, the examples of poor horticulture are astounding. Many parking lots or shopping centers we pass have major problems in their landscaping. When a tree or shrub bed dies out in the entrance to the local drug store, who complains to the store manager? When that same tree or shrub bed dies out next to the restroom near the 5th green, much less next to the clubhouse, we all know the golf course superintendent is the one who hears about it. It is also this level of expectation that helps keep our golf courses in such fine condition. Within the past few years the appreciation of the aesthetic environment has come more to the forefront than ever before. Anyone who has worked with a golf course for several months begins to recognize familiar faces. Many of the "regulars" play the course several times a week, if not every day. Golf becomes their major source of recreation and enjoyment of the outdoor environment. These are the people who cast a critical eye on all that happens on the course. The average golfer plays not only for the challenge of the game, but also for the total enjoyment of the experience which takes place during the game. The total aesthetic environment is perceived primarily by sight, sound, and smell. As golf course professionals we need to address specific elements in our landscapes which will enhance these perceptions. This is done by designing focal areas on the course which are used to achieve a certain horticultural theme.



Burmese Crape Myrtle - blooms from August to November.

This theme can be targeted to accentuate those sensory perceptions we all enjoy. The color of a yellow *Tabebuia* against an azure blue Florida sky, the alluring scent of an unknown shrub, or the sound of the evening Whip-poor-will across the fairway are perceptions we have all experienced.

With the proper planning, use, and placement of trees, shrubs, woody vines, and ground covers, those areas of the course that have been looked upon as maintenance liabilities or eyesores become a resource -- one that we pursue actively to create spectacular focal areas of flowering trees, or passively to turn a perimeter planting into a wildlife habitat area to screen unwanted sights and sounds. The most important task we face as industry professionals is to develop the golf course, common grounds, and other areas to their highest and best aesthetic potential.

HORTICULTURE HINTS: Using flowering trees effectively requires more than the obvious of simply planting a tree. Always conduct a site analysis with soil samples, a common practice for greens, why not before landscaping? You should know the pH, organics, and elemental analysis of the soil before you attempt to amend it. The most important rule in landscape horticulture is to place the correct plant in the correct spot. Do some research and find where that plant grows naturally and then what it will tolerate. If you have a tree that you wish to place in a certain location, and that location is not the right one, DON'T DO IT! If you insist on that location, then change the site to fit landscape requirements. Nothing is more disheartening than to have a consultant come in and tell you that those large yellow *tabebuias* you planted in the wrong location died from temporary flooding after a four inch rain. Some trees and shrubs need dry, wet, sunny, shady, or acid conditions, and those requirements need to be met. If you take

time to find out about your plants, you will see many of those problem areas in the landscape begin to disappear.

RULES FOR USING FLOWERING TREES:

1. When using flowering trees that are deciduous (lose their leaves), use them in conjunction with evergreen trees. Why? When looking at a deciduous tree from a distance, you tend to look right through that leafless tree into the landscape behind it. If you have used evergreens, you won't even see that leafless tree. The evergreen also serves a second function in providing a dark green backdrop for the floral display.

2. Use flowering trees in groups not only to accentuate the effect of the color but also to extend the duration of the bloom. Since no two trees come into bloom at the same time, you can extend the time when there is color in the landscape simply by planting trees in groups, rather than as single specimens.

3. Deciduous trees also allow the use of many energy landscaping techniques. They provide winter sun and summer shade. Winter sun is always important when planting annuals below a tree, but it also allows for solar heating of free-standing restrooms which are normally damp and cold in shaded locations. That same tree will provide shade for the building in the summer, thus reducing cooling costs. Facilitating cleanup many trees drop their leaves at one time to prepare themselves for a breathtaking floral display. This major bloom is so spectacular the term has been coined, "The Big Bang Effect".

4. Design and develop landscapes using contrasting or harmonious colors. Lavender colors, such as that produced by the Jacaranda tree, contrasted with an underplanting of Aztec Gold daylilies makes a good combination. Combining harmonious colors such as the West Indian Shower trees in a curve-a-linear planting with the dark green pittosporum "Whellerii" and a border of multicolored pansies offers exceptional color for many winter months.

5. Create a color calendar. By learning about tropical flowering trees and how they bloom you can develop a landscape that changes every month. Winter or summer, South Florida has unexcelled potential for the use of color in the landscape. We are limited only by climatic extremes and our own imaginations.

SOME NEW TREES TO LOOK FOR IN THE TRADE