



# When the Natives Get Restless...



*Native grass beds, sandy waste bunkers and natural areas may require less routine maintenance than traditional turf areas, nevertheless they do need attention or Mother Nature will take them over. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

**T**he use of more natural areas or waste areas in modern golf course design makes sense and is the right thing to do in our environmentally sensitive times. These areas require fewer inputs of water, fertilizer and chemicals. More courses are also using native plants in the course landscaping plan for the same reasons.

While significant savings in labor, fuel, and equipment wear can be realized, going native or natural is not a free ride. They do require some maintenance or they can become a high profile weed patch.

The following articles contain information about native plant selection, impact on playing the game, and successful maintenance procedures to help you to manage your back to nature ventures.

CELEBRATION G.C.

## Managing 'Natural' Cordgrass Beds

**D**esigned with less turf and with the environment in mind, a lot of cordgrass beds are used on our course in out-of-play areas and as buffers around the lakes. We use a combination program of selective and nonselective herbicides to control the weeds that seem to love to inhabit these "natural" areas.

Our program is simple and fairly effective. We spray Round Up and Surflan along the edges of the beds to control volunteer weeds and creeping bermudagrass. By adding the Surflan we have prolonged the period between repeat applications. This tank mix is applied with a 25 gallon LESCO electric sprayer mounted in the bed of a

Jacobsen Hauler and runs off the Hauler's battery. The rate of 1 oz. of Round Up per gallon of water with 16 oz. of Surflan. Make sure you mix the Surflan either as a slurry or agitate with a hose when filling the tank since the tank does not have internal agitation.

When broadleaf weeds emerge deep in the bed interiors or in the native grass clumps an over-the-top application of 2,4-D will control most of the species. We like to use the large 200 gal. spray rig since we're covering more area and this avoids a lot of fill up trips to the shop. We use the label rate of 3 pints per 100 gal. rate for fence line and brush spraying. I don't use Surflan in this application since most of the plants are emerging from the grass clumps and not the soil. In both applications, surfactants are added or left out according to the label recommendations.

In the natural wetland areas the staff has to go in once a year and manually remove or prune back the primrose and wild willows that encroach into the aquatic plantings and overhang the bridges. The cordgrass beds were slow filling in this year due to the drought, but now that the rains have started, they have greened up spread out and helped to naturally prevent weed growth and encroachment.

JOHN DEMATTEO, CGCS

SHADOW WOOD CC

## All Waste Areas Are Not Created Equal

First, all native grass beds, natural areas and waste areas are, in fact, considered waste areas. Under the rules of golf, you are allowed to ground your club in a waste area whereas in a sand trap, you are not.

Second, each area is a separate subject and an authorized area to be established on a golf course, i.e. grass beds, natural areas and waste areas. I will discuss our maintenance ideas for each type of feature mentioned.

### Native grass beds

These are areas that do require a minimum of maintenance. If you use our native grasses, *Spartina bakeri* (sand

cordgrass) or *Muhlenbergia capillaris* (muhly grass), you will require a minimal amount of maintenance. Water is only required through the initial grow-in. During our season of golf, we will also pick Mexican Petunias for color and *Viburnum obovatum* 'walters'. These grow slowly and don't require much maintenance or irrigation. Golfers are required to play from these areas or incur a penalty stroke.

### Natural areas

These are similar to native grass beds but these areas are already existing on the land when the course is developed. Rarely do you add any material in these areas. They require little to no maintenance or irrigation. Like native grass beds you are required to play from these areas or incur a penalty stroke.

### Waste areas

We use No.131 gravel screenings from the local rock quarry for our waste areas. We also have added plant material in some locations of the waste area to add color and aesthetics to the course. They require little maintenance and irrigation. Golfers are required to play from them just as a fairway bunker. However you are allowed to ground your club in the waste area, but are not allowed to do so in a fairway bunker.

From a management concept, these are wonderful areas to have on your golf course. They offer natural beauty to your golf course if managed properly. These areas versus turf are no brainers. Put them on the courses. They reduce the area of turf that you need to mow, fertilize and maintain. The less wear and tear that you can put on your mowers means longer life for that piece of equipment. We have approximately 4 to 5 acres of these areas our golf course. Mowing and maintaining that much additional turf requires more man-hours, parts and service of the equipment.

In addition to less maintenance, these areas provide the homeowners with an natural ambiance and better habitat for wildlife in their community. Many of these areas are home to fox, rabbit, birds, squirrels and other wildlife. That's something you can't put a price tag on.

As far as the actual dollar savings, I can't

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give you an exact amount. I know we obviously use less fertilizer, pesticides and irrigation water, which all cost money. Those savings can be better spent on the more important parts of the golf course to make sure your golfers get good playing conditions and a good value for their money spent.

MIKE ANDERSON  
*Landscape Specialist*

#### COLLIER'S RESERVE

## Some Like It Hot; Others Don't Care

Over the past seven years I have had a lot of experience with installing native plants at Collier's Reserve. Just like any other plant, natives need to be used in the right location so they will do well.

Some like it wetter, sunnier, drier, and some just don't care where you put them. My experience tells me the following native plants work very well in the right low-maintenance situations.

Saw palmetto is one of the plants that really seem to be able to take whatever you throw at them: wet, dry, sunny, shade. Just get them established and forget about them. The green variety seems to grow relatively slowly compared to the silver, especially if they are getting only a little water.

Muhlygrass is a great low-maintenance, clump-type grass that gets to 3½ feet if it is doing stellar. One of the great things about this plant is that it gets beautiful pink inflorescences in the fall. This grass can take it really dry, but doesn't do well in shade.

Wiregrass is another great low-maintenance grass, but is not readily available. It gets to be approximately 2 feet at jumbo size. It will take more shade than muhlygrass, but still loves the sun.

Wax Myrtle is a great plant when used correctly. Grows fast, gets pretty bushy, is a great wildlife attractor, but too often is used incorrectly. Wax myrtle, it needs water. All too often they are planted on berms or elevated areas with poor to no irrigation. These are plants that perform best in areas that get plenty of water. Not necessarily standing water, but a good drink.

Beautyberry — I really like this plant, and so does the wildlife that loves to eat the

berries. It is easy to propagate from young seedlings or cuttings. This bush gets large and thick and once established, is relatively maintenance free.

Cocoplum makes a great hedge, but is cold sensitive. It works well in sun or shade, wet or dry but not too arid.

At Collier's Reserve we have almost 130 acres of preserve areas on the project. To control the broadleaf weeds in the natives, we have found that light rates of 2,4-D can be sprayed with no effect on the plant material. We use 0.5 oz. to 1 oz. per 1000 sq. ft. with Surflan and Gallery combo to prevent them from coming back in two weeks. This treatment usually gets us three to four months of control in our cordgrass berms. As far as pesticides go, natives really don't have a big problem. The pines sometimes get tip borers in the summer, and the Coontie occasionally gets some scale.

Our cultural practices have taken a more unconventional approach in the fact that we try to burn most of our native areas. I have a Prescribed Fire Manager's license from the Florida Department of Agriculture, and we have been doing controlled burns for about four years now. In the areas that we are unable to burn, we hand prune. All of our native areas that are along the edges of the fairways are considered lateral hazards. I will say that if you play golf at Collier's, you had better bring some extra balls, because once it goes in — it rarely comes out.

I often get asked if the native areas save money, and the answer is undeniably yes. Natives use a lot less water, often have very little if any insect and disease issues, they grow on their own in an infertile environment — so they use a lot less fertilizer, they require very little manpower to maintain, and maintenance is required extremely infrequently. When you compare that to bermudagrass, I think that it is easy to see the cost savings.

BILL DAVIDSON, GCS

#### SEVEN RIVERS G&CC

## Natural Areas Serve Several Functions

Yesterday's meeting of the Southwest Florida Water Management District's

Green Industry Advisory Committee plays right into the message being delivered in this Hands-On topic.

Natural areas play several roles on a golf course for me and I have different forms of natural areas.

Some of these areas once were irrigated and through the installation of part-circle heads and actually removing a few more, we have been able to reduce water consumption to a small degree. It becomes a matter of educating your membership why these areas are beneficial

**1. Untouched areas:** They provide areas for wildlife. Areas once maintained, not for play but just because-it's-grass-and-therefore-we-must-mow-them, have been allowed to return to nature, so to speak.

These areas consist of a couple of brush piles in low visibility areas which have been allowed to become overgrown with vegetation and a few open, out-of-the-way grassy areas. The red shoulder hawks love this area and frequently come away with a meal consisting of mice, snakes etc.

**2. Pine straw areas:** They require little maintenance, look nice and are actually playable once the straw has been packed down. A little Round-Up and Surflan combination may be needed to keep edges clean and weeds from popping up.

I plan at some time in the near future to create bunker-type areas around large oak trees and use coquina shell as the backfill. Gainesville C.C. has these areas and they solve the age-old problem of lousy turf under big, shady trees.

I find these types of areas an excellent opportunity to decrease maintenance to a degree and to conserve water. These areas do not need to be irrigated though they may have been at one time. Water is going to get scarce for landscape and golf course irrigation as growth and development continues.

You can conserve your current water allocations and redirect them to critical areas on the course by using more natural and native areas on your course.

STUART BOZEMAN, GCS