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# Landscape for impact

BY KEVIN DOWNING, CGCS

*Golf/Landscape Manager  
Willoughby Golf Club*

**H**ow many times have you heard a golfer in Florida make a direct comparison between their course “up North” and how it is always better than the course they play on in Florida?

I think that most of us in the turf

business who have had the opportunity to visit courses in the cool season belt would agree that the texture and color of the bentgrasses and bluegrasses sometimes have an edge on the bermuda strains.

Ten years ago, a golfer would most likely prefer a bentgrass putting surface over a bermudagrass green, but because of new technology and better management by superintendents in our state, we

have made major strides in equalizing this comparison.

So what is it? Why do golfers still think that the courses up North outshine our Florida courses with all their majestic water hazards and sculptured bunkers?

My answer to this question was answered a number of years ago after I had the chance to travel and play some famous courses in the Northeast.

The beauty and aura of spots like



*The use of native plants and understory provide excellent backdrop and definition to the hole, aiding the golfer's depth perception.*

Winged Foot, Baltusrol, Soucon Valley, Ridgewood and even Pine Valley had one similar characteristic in the fact that they had trees and, more importantly, they had *mature* trees. Utilizing the existing foliage or enhancing with additional landscape material has created some strong features that provide backdrops and framing for these great courses.

A lot of our courses in Florida depend entirely on mounding or bunkers for

**Why do golfers still think that the courses up North outshine our Florida courses with all their majestic water hazards and sculptured bunkers?**

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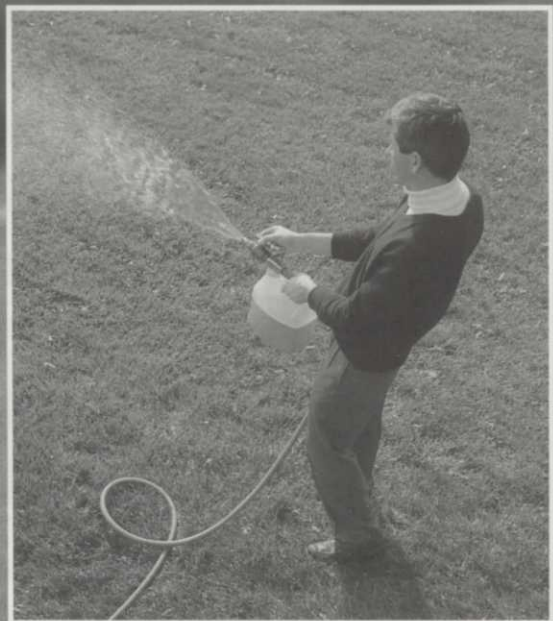
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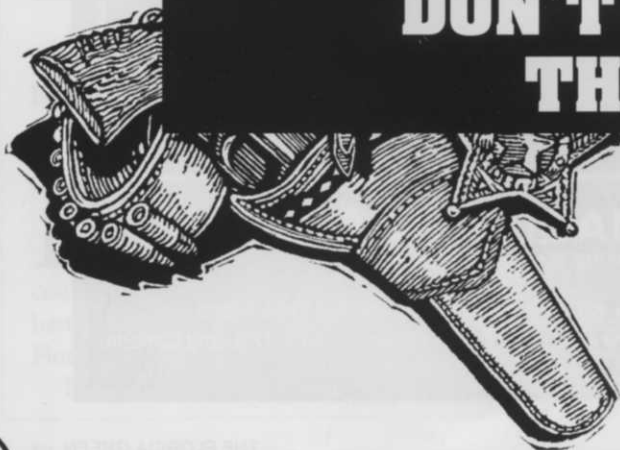
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these same design components. Some of our courses scattered throughout the state have been blessed with great natural vegetation but, for the most part, the courses end up on a site of piney flatwoods with a strong emphasis on barrel-tiled rooflines.

The enhancement of our courses can be positively influenced if clubs and superintendents make a conscious effort to implement an ongoing landscape program.

I think the Pine Valley Golf Club in New Jersey represents a classic example of a nice, sandy site that possessed good design characteristics, but its beauty and stature in today's golf circles might have been shaped by the efforts on the golf superintendent Ed Steinger and club president, Mr. Brown.

Photo documentation clearly shows that tree planting programs that were started in the 1930s and 1940s in order to compliment the existing course, have dramatically helped this top-ranked course attain its lofty position.

So what's the point? Another northern course with great trees? The important point is for us to look up from the turf for awhile and study the course from a player's viewpoint looking down a fairway or peering into a greens complex.

### **Establishing a concept**

Many superintendents are geared to turf management and might not have the proper training or experience to initiate a long-range landscape plan. If you think that you are not skilled enough, then it is probably worth your while to interact your club officials with either a landscape architect or designer to help you through the review and planning processes.

The predominant reason for initiating a long-term plan is because the changing individual concerns of committees might have a tendency to alter good concepts. Usually a landscape program might take five to 10 years to implement which sometimes would outlast the tenure of the superintendent.

One pitfall to avoid is make sure that

your landscape adviser is familiar with the game of golf and educate him or her on the positive and negative effects that trees have on turf operations.

### **Key components.**

Playability of the course should always be the key factor in your plan. Studying how each hole is played or perceived influences the decision on trees or underplanting locations.

Understanding the growth rate and maturity of each material used is a key component to the success of the project. Good golf holes become great when the framing or backdrop quality is enhanced by proper planting.

Always take the time to stake out planned tree or landscape bed sites a few days before actual installation so you can take the time and imagine how they will appear from a variety of different angles.

Spacing is an art form, since you are always worried about the look of initial installation but must be prepared to deal with the effects of overcrowding down

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*Homes, a shopping center, or even a landfill or a phosphate mine could lurk undetected behind the native vegetation, which makes a very effective buffer.*

## ***Saving our native areas adds instant credibility and maturity, but the costs of keeping these areas “natural” in a maintained-turf environment can be overwhelming.***

the road. I have always used the philosophy of “plant to transplant.” Today five trees might look perfect in a planting but at a later date, the same site will appear more attractive if you transplant out two or three of the specimens to allow for adequate tree maturity.

Spacing for equipment maneuverability is important and don't overlook the concern of planting too close to main playing areas.

Staggering of heights can enable a site to take on a mature look just a little bit sooner. There are certain situations where the best alternative would be to introduce mature trees that initially cost more but obviously make an immediate impact on a void area.

Along with this type of solution, it would sometimes make perfect sense to introduce similar varieties that are smaller in height to give the project scale and depth.

In some tree plantings, it is beneficial to introduce lower shrub planting that will make the whole landscape seem complete and might balance the seasonality of the trees. Care needs to be taken when using this base planting of shrubbery to not adversely affect the playability of the course by unduly penalizing the errant golf shot.

Selection of the proper material for your course is another component of a landscape plan that stands the test of time. Mother nature has always been the best landscape designer so it only makes sense to copy some of her skills by utilizing landscape material that is indigenous to your area.

Using selections that are found within 100 miles of your course minimizes the risk of unsuccessful plant establishment. Take time to travel to other courses in your area so you can visualize the plants in existing situations, but don't necessar-

ily limit your selections to what you see because experimenting with other varieties can be worthwhile.

The use of xeriscape plants will save you a lot of time and money in the after-care process. Simply stated, the xeriscape process is not only the emphasis of water conservation, but making sure that you place the right tree, plant or vine into a situation which will enhance its survival and accomplish your goal. So much can be said about this concept but probably it is the basis for another article.

In my observations, one of the biggest mistakes made in landscaping courses is the over-use of too many varieties that end up looking like a fire-sale project. I think a course should not utilize more than 12 to 18 varieties with no more than four to six on a given hole.

To emphasize my point, I have never seen an attractive natural setting that had more than these quantities of

groundcover or canopy trees.

Natural design has been the trend in the last few years because of environmental concerns and legislative pressure, but I disagree with a recent *Golf Digest* article that totally ruled out the suggestion of flowers on the course. Proper use of high visibility flowers whether perennial or annual adds a finishing touch to a course.

Saving our native areas adds instant credibility and maturity to the golf course, but let's be honest in recognizing that the costs of keeping these areas "natural" in a maintained-turf environment can be overwhelming. Be selective in what you try to retain and maintain because the vines and exotics can cause more problems than the pine or myrtle that you are striving to save.

When our company started working on the Willoughby Golf Club project, one of the first things we adopted after the golf course corridors were cleared, was the establishment of a landscape concept. We also carried this theme into the interaction of the course landscape plan with the eventual landscape design of the housing units.

Because of this initial planning, we have been able to continue to build out the community with the golf course character still intact. A good landscape plan at your club can introduce this design character and will help the facility mature gracefully.



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Each superintendent applicant for an At Large Membership must demonstrate a hardship which prevents him/her from being a member of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association via a local association. Please list below the reasons for applying for this special membership category.

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# Bermudagrass has tough time recovering from blue-green algae

*Prevention with cultural practices  
and fungicides is a lot easier than  
elimination and reclamation*

BY MONICA ELLIOTT  
University of Florida, IFAS  
Fort Lauderdale Research and  
Education Center

**B**lue-green algae can be a problem on putting greens in Florida all year when excess water, either in the form of irrigation or rainfall, is prevalent.

These algae seem to readily occupy any soil area that is not covered by bermudagrass. Once the blue-green algae become established, the area can become crusty, which prevents the bermudagrass from growing back into that soil area. It is also possible that toxins produced by these algae may prevent bermudagrass recovery.

Many golf course superintendents use dilute sodium hypochlorite (e.g., Clorox) and feel they obtain effective control.

However, to my knowledge, this is not a legal use of the product since sodium hypochlorite is not registered for use on turfgrass and, as such, cannot be recommended by the University of Florida for use as a pesticide.

Mancozeb and maneb products (EBDC fungicides) are currently labeled for algae control. When EBDC fungicides were under review by EPA for re-registration, there was the possibility that these fungicides would not be re-registered. It would also be useful to be able to rotate between fungicide classes to prevent fungicide resistance from developing.

Therefore, studies were begun to determine if other fungicides would be effective for algae control. The turfgrass area used for the experiments were Tifdwarf bermudagrass located on the FGCSA research putting green.

Fungicides such as chlorothalonil (Daconil 2787) and anilazine (Dyrene) are currently or have been used in paints for control of algae. Thus they were considered as the most likely candidates for algae control on turfgrass, especially since they already have turfgrass labels.

However, anilazine was not included in the study since it will no longer be manufactured and, as such eventually will not be available for use.

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**However, I would hope that superintendents would initiate cultural and chemical control methods before the crust develops, as it is extremely difficult to eliminate algae and regrow grass once a crust has developed.**

The fungicides were applied preventively. In other words, they were applied as soon as the environmental conditions were conducive for disease development.

For research purposes, this meant that we irrigated heavily twice a day in addition to any rainfall received.

Similar results were observed in 1991 and 1992. Both mancozeb (Dithane DF) and chlorothalonil (Daconil 2787) fungicides, when applied at labeled rates and intervals, were effective in control-

ling algae development.

A new product on the market that has been effective for algae control in studies conducted in Texas is quaternary ammonium salts (Consan Triple Action 20 and Algaen-X).

One note of caution with these products: They should not be mixed with iron-based products or with dye indicators.

Theses will be included in the algae studies this summer here in Florida as

well as studies on timing intervals of fungicide applications.

We also plan to look at curative control of blue-green algae. In other words, what to do after the crust has developed.

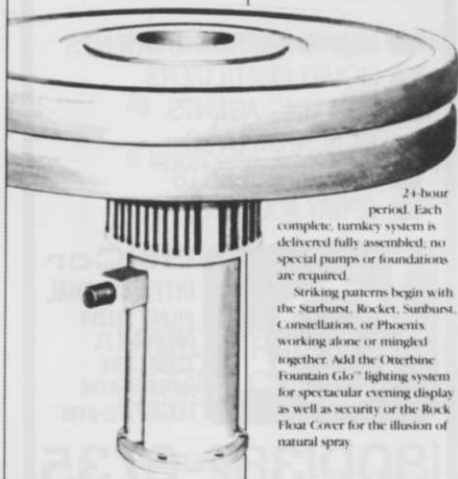
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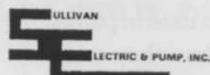
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