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can be very informative and is a great tool to communicate your ideas to your club owner, members or manager. When making this choice, keep in mind that multiple wildflower varieties may be very beneficial to the planting success, much like overseeding blends that have become popular for our winter course turf needs.

Planting Locations

Mass plantings are the best approach in most course settings. Successful implementation will provide for good presentation, reduced maintenance, sufficient sunlight and will not interfere with the playability of the course. Take the time to determine where locations offer maximum exposure to your golfers, which is often the teeing area or alongside cart paths.

Turf areas around the tees can sometimes be removed to facilitate planting. In most cases, this maintained turf is never played from, and a planting bed instead of turf may reduce your maintenance inputs for the area. Flowering plants need sunshine so pay close attention to what your seasonal sun conditions will be in your

desired planting area. Remember, Florida golf is at its peak season when the sun is lowest in the sky.

Lastly, review your proposed planting areas with your golf professional. These areas may be marked as an ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area), but that should be determined by your course professional or appropriate committee. It will be best to protect these areas, and marking in this way can be very effective.

Timing of Planting

Choose the time when you want the flowers to be their best and determine your timing of planting based on that. If you choose a mix of several varieties of wildflowers, different varieties will germinate, grow and flower at different times and can make your planting very interesting as they fully establish.

Typically, the window for planting in South Florida is mid to late October, for more moderate temperatures while the plants are young, giving great presentation by Jan. 1. Planting different beds at different times can provide for varied colors and size throughout the course

if desired. Gaillardia (Blanket Flower) should be included in all plantings so this heat-loving plant can establish as the winter season wraps up and will provide color and function during the summer months.

Once you have committed to trying your hand at installing wildflower beds here are some tips on what worked for us:

Wildflower Planting Procedures

- Preparation and planting of wildflower areas is not difficult and can be easily accomplished with existing personnel and equipment. To improve seed-to-soil contact and provide a soft soil for new plant roots, rototilling is recommended at a depth of 4 inches. Prior to rototilling, any weeds on the surface should be sprayed out, or in the case of replacing a turf area, the turf should be removed with a deep cut from a sod cutter. This process is repeated year after year in the same planting areas. If problematic weeds continue to emerge and establish amongst your flowers, utilizing Basamid soil fumigant can be very effective and

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Using this Gulf Coast Carribbean seed mix provides a variety of germination rates to keep the bed colorful over a longer time period . Photo by Kyle Sweet.

In some cases hand planting may be the best way to apply and conserve expensive seed mixes. Photo by Kyle Sweet.



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can nearly eliminate persistent weeds that compete with the wildflower establishment.

- In some cases it may be beneficial to incorporate a muck soil or compost into the planting area. Much of Florida has barren sandy soils that do not support moisture holding or have a high CEC. Starter fertilization is not typically needed for wildflowers. If there is a known high / low pH issue that needed correction for turf growth, that same correction would be needed prior to seeding.
- Seeding rates vary among varieties and your supplier can help you by providing recommended rates. In the golf course setting it may be necessary to increase the suggested rate for quicker coverage, but be careful not to plant too heavily as this will cause crowding out and decrease the plants' opportunity to grow to maturity and exhibit full flowering. Measure out the planting area, weigh out the needed seed for the area based on your rate, then bag and label the seed with the area it is intended for. This will help with controlling your rates and budget for your planting, as most seed varieties are several dollars/pound.
- Some seed can be spread with a rotary spreader or a belly spreader, but in many cases it is done by hand. When applying by hand, preparation with pre-measuring and weighing is very important so seed is not wasted and is applied as needed.
- Like any other new plant, wildflower seedlings require additional watering to be established. Small irrigation heads and specialized zones can be installed to water the areas, or existing irrigation heads may need to be adjusted to cover properly. Once the wildflowers are established, irrigation will not be needed. Florida winters can be unpredictable, so if you have a big investment in wildflowers, be aware of plants drying out to the point of damage and be ready to water if needed.

Management of Wildflower areas

Management of wildflower areas should not have to be excessive, but don't mistake reduced maintenance for no maintenance. Maintenance items include pulling of weeds, trimming along planting edges, occasional water if too dry, interseeding back in to the area as needed, and dead-heading of spent flowers.

With no pre-emergent herbicide in place before planting, you can count on some weeds amongst your plantings. Many use the approach of pulling the weeds as the weeds become larger than the plants. Sometimes spot spraying may be needed, but typically avoided and pulled by hand.

As the plants mature they can easily intrude on adjacent turf edges and cart paths. Routine pulling of plants and trimming may be needed to protect the plants from being mowed and impeding on pathways. Bordering all planting edges with a pre-emergent herbicide and mulching is an effective way to reduce this maintenance.

Always have some seed on hand that is a quick germinator. A splash of seed in a bare area or area where plants are damaged can quickly grow in and provide cover. Tall spent flowers can be unsightly and can cause the need to dead-head to keep a

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good presentation. If multiple varieties are used in the planting, this won't be as critical, but discussion with your supplier on the life span and size of the flower choices can be very important to reduce this maintenance need.

Seeding Costs and Maintenance Input Reduction

Wildflower seed cost can vary greatly. Typically, a standard prepared blend of wildflower varieties will cost approximately \$25 per pound. These standard mixes are normally available year round with ample supplies. A custom mix could cost significantly more and availability may be limited. Overall, the cost of wildflowers is much less than planting annual bedding flowers.

At a planting rate of 2 pounds per 1000 square feet, which is a generous rate for blended seed mixes, it would cost \$500 to establish a 10,000 square-foot area by seed. By comparison, annual bedding

plants at a cost of 69 cents each, planted on 12-inch centers would cost \$6,900 for the same 10,000 square-foot area. Annual bedding plants provide somewhat instant gratification, but the same colorful effect can be achieved with wildflowers at a significantly less price.

In addition to the initial cost of seed, wildflowers will require little to no fertilizer inputs or fungicide applications. These reduced inputs will save material and labor costs, which can add up to a large amount during the course of the seasonal months and beyond.

Wildflowers can provide dramatic color presentations on the golf course while at the same time benefit important pollinators that are important to us all. If desired, wildflower plantings can replace high maintenance turf areas and can be a successful substitute for the use of annual bedding flowers. With proper planning, planting and management, you can create a new feature on your course year after year that you can be proud of.



Wildflower beds provide food and habitat for pollinators which are critical for plant life. Photo by Kyle Sweet.

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FIELD OBSERVATIONS

9/11 Reminds Me We Need to Stay Strong



By *Ralph K. Dain Jr.*,
GCSAA Regional Representative Florida

As I am writing this piece, I remember what I was doing at this time exactly 10 years ago. I was the superintendent at Sailfish Point in Stuart. I had just returned to my office from checking the golf course. My mechanic told me a plane had hit the World Trade Center so we popped into the break room and watched what unfolded in horror and silence. I prayed for those impacted by this then and I continue to pray for those who are still impacted by this event today.

As days and weeks passed after Sept. 11, 2001, I remember thinking how important it is not to let opportunities pass you by and take advantage when you have the chance to do something meaningful. By

no means am I trying to equate speaking out on topics that impact our industry with the sacrifices of those who serve in our military, or police and fire departments. But we have made the decision to work in the golf industry, and there are opportunities to lead our profession when we have struggles or need individuals to speak up.

In my travels and interactions with the various chapters around the state, my focus has been the three GCSAA Action Alert Messages. We have been prompting our members to speak out on the issues regarding the NPDES Legislative Fix, Protection of the H2B Visa Program, and the inclusion of golf facilities in Natural Disaster Relief Funding. Your willingness to fill out the Action Alert Comments online has been well documented and has made an impact at all levels.

Recently we sent out a call to action with the idea of meeting with Senator Bill Nelson's staff at his eight district offices around the state. The request for volunteers was met by numerous individuals willing to participate. Chava McKeel, GCSAA Advocacy Department, prepared three great, one-page speaking-point documents to be used in these sessions.

This outreach effort received a great boost when Erin Boyd Wilder, FTGA Board member and representative for Sod Solutions, was able to organize a meeting with Senator Nelson's chief of staff, Pete Mitchell, in Tallahassee. Mark

Kann, FGCSA president, Joel Jackson, FGCSA executive director, Erin, and I met with Mr. Mitchell and were allowed a solid hour of interaction to express our thoughts on all three issues. We left after a very positive session with Mr. Mitchell with the belief that our messages will get in front of Senator Nelson.

Again, I realize these are not earth-shattering events, but within the industry where we all make a living, it is important to take the time to have our voices heard. It is often easy to get into a bunker mentality and just focus on the 18-36 holes for which we are responsible. If we remain silent and let others dictate policy with misinformation, there is a very real threat that you will wake up one morning, head to work, and have none of the tools currently at your disposal. After reading this, look around your facility and think about the number of items in your arsenal that could come under attack. There are many. Then boot up your computer and look to see if GCSAA has any new Action Alerts running and take a few minutes to help protect the way you do your job.

Silence is not always golden.

Until next time, I remain,

Ralph K. Dain Jr.
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END OF AN ERA



**GREEN SIDE UP
BY JOEL JACKSON**

On Friday, July 8, 2011, the space shuttle Endeavor blasted off on the final mission for any current American space vehicle.

Many of us have witnessed 50 years of space exploration and technological advances spearheaded by the United States.

On the one hand it is an end of an era, on the other it begins a new era of perhaps even more far-reaching unmanned

exploration thanks to advances in remote guidance technology. And there likely will be a more cooperative atmosphere of joint multinational manned trips to the space station.

The economic crash of 2008 saw the end of a decades-old golf-course-building boom, due to the failure of the associated real estate markets and bank closings. But just as the space industry is morphing into a new configuration, so will the golf industry.

We have seen the multi-association cooperative known as “We Are Golf” emerge as a group that speaks of the benefits and contributions of golf to the nation’s economy and social and recreational benefits to people seeking ways to enjoy the outdoors and a little friendly competition. Next February we will join our allied Florida Golf Associations in a Florida Golf Day in Tallahassee to promote our industry and educate people about the issues.

Golf courses across the country are shedding their stuffy, rigid rules of golf’s

approach to the game and introducing multiple forward tee options so people can actually score and enjoy the game. Programs like “Get Golf Ready” and “Play Golf America” are gaining traction and courses are allocating times for beginners, juniors and seniors to enjoy the club’s course and amenities without feeling like a burden or hindrance to the more skilled players.

Isn’t it in the best interest of a club and the industry to foster these changes and accommodations to grow the game? Like the space industry, we cannot afford to keep flying the old business models. We need to come up with some new ideas and programs to make golf viable and desirable.

Most golfers want a nice-looking golf course, but they must also change their perceptions about having it “perfect all the time.” Turf perfection is not a requirement to play golf. Reasonably smooth and consistent is a fair compromise for 95 percent of the play. Professional tournament venues and ultra-

high-end clubs that can afford it are welcome to raise their grooming levels for special events.

However, the reality for all of golf — including the PGA Tour and the exclusive clubs — is that the growing pressure on our natural resources politically and agronomically will mandate conservation of these resources and will require some concessions on turf color and sometimes density in the roughs on a course.

We are talking mainly about water availability and quality. More and more moisture-sensing devices and methods to manage our water use on golf courses are emerging, along with ways to calculate and plot distressed areas that can be spot-watered just like we learned to spot-treat with pesticides.

Yes, we are the end of an era in which many of us grew up, but we are also at the beginning of a new one which might be different, but I think will be no less exciting. It will be another new frontier to travel.



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