



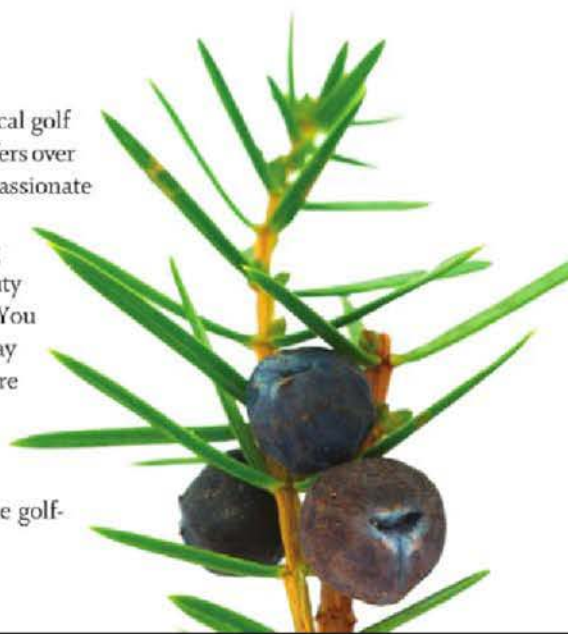
FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

Maintained ornamentals add just as much to the overall experience at your course as manicured greens and fairways. Pest control expert Joe Cea outlines how to protect that landscaped beauty from varmints looking to make it their lunch.

by Joe Cea

While maintaining the grounds and greens of a local golf course there is one thing I have learned about golfers over the better part of the last decade – they are very passionate about their sport and how they play.

In spite of this zealotry for the game and always striving for personal “bests” even bad play can be augmented by the beauty of the course itself. Every golfer has had “one of those days”. You know “Not my day today but you know what: it’s a beautiful day on a beautiful course...” Even in passing I’ve heard this quote more than a few times while meandering around the course carrying out my responsibilities. As part of the grounds crew I always key in on the last part about the grounds being beautiful. Indeed, I have first-hand familiarity that when it comes to the golf-



ing experience, a well-designed and maintained landscape plays an integral part.

Sculpting that landscape obviously has several purposes and objectives. Visual appeal, especially driving up to and around the clubhouse area, is first and foremost. Specific ornamentals and perennials help guide golfers through the course and/or provide challenges as well as shield certain supplemental areas, such as a pool, tennis court or mid-course bathroom from common view. The challenge not only lies with matching your landscape to the particulars of your course – such as taking into account shade tolerance or having weeping willow trees near ponds – but also taking into account the various wildlife species that typically inhabit a golf course that may damage your hard work.

Obviously, keeping the very character of the course intact and beautiful is paramount to enhance a round of golf. But from a cost standpoint, every superintendent knows it's easy to drop big dollars on ornamental plants only to have

them completely destroyed by deer, rabbits and other native wildlife the very next day.

Realistically, if the majority of your ornamentals live behind netting, burlap or individual wire/wooden coverings to prevent wildlife damage, then not only does it look awful but it suggests a different approach is required.

The first line of defense is to find specific plants that not only bloom brilliantly, but are not palatable for some wildlife species. This is mostly in reference to whitetail deer as there are many lists from both private and public wildlife management agencies, as well as university cooperative extension offices, that specify plants that deer don't like.

Let's first draw a distinction between the terms "resistant" and "repel." Plants that repel deer will usually keep them at a distance. Many plants that fall into this category have a strong odor, such as lilac or sage. Deer resistant plants are ones deer typically won't eat. Even when eaten, they will still retain their character showing little effects of browsing. Common



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examples include barberry, holly and juniper. Other more colorful examples would be snapdragons, alyssum, iris and marigolds.

Other protections against deer include fencing, but the trick is to place them not only to protect, but also to allow your flower arrangements to be seen and admired. Most recommendations for deer fencing include having one 7 foot or higher. However, fencing of this nature is usually in reference to preventing deer from invading the perimeter of a property which you will never be able to do on a golf course consisting of several hundred acres. That said deer can browse some plants such as arborvitae up to six feet and perimeter fencing on some areas

may help protect – at least on a limited basis – in this endeavor. Our main goal, though, is simply to protect some flower beds. In doing so we just have to keep the flowers far enough away from the outstretched browsing reach of a whitetail. Angling a fence pointing outward – at 45 degrees – from a flower bed does just this because deer have a difficult time judging angles, i.e. jumping high and over distance therefore avoid fencing when not up right at 90 degrees. Decorative fencing can be set up in this manner, but I suggest some kind of blunted point at the top that will come right up under the neck of deer to prevent them from advancing. Also elevate flower beds about three feet in conjunction with angled fenc-



Grow your own

To cut down on costs of consistently replacing wildlife damaged plants you may wish to consider a greenhouse to grow your own flowers.

While the start-up costs may prove high, this is definitely an investment where costs will be defrayed over time. Also, if individual gardens and flower beds scattered throughout the course prove too tough with multiple attempts, then you may wish to consider an arboretum with a nature trail. This not only shows off your plants, but can be more easily protected with everything in one area. This can be a fantastic feature to a course.



ing prohibit deer from reaching or jumping to the bed.

Elevated flower beds also prevent damage from our next contestant – rabbits.

Rabbits are endowed with an amazing jumping ability. Even elevated flower beds will not prevent access. So the goal with an animal that is typically more numerous than deer is to reduce damage because 100 percent prevention is next to impossible. If you have flower beds on the ground a smaller fence (maybe 2-3 feet high) can limit rabbit damage.

Reinforce this by attaching either ½ inch x ½ inch or ¼ inch x ¼ inch galvanized hardware cloth to the fence and buried in the ground three to four inches and then folded outward another 3 inches or so to prevent digging underneath. This should cut down drastically on rabbits chewing the tops off your expensive flowers.

Recognition of which species is nibbling is important. Flowers with a clean cut and lower to the ground are usually rabbits because they are smaller and because their lower and upper incisors leave

Spray away

There are dozens of sprays and other repellents that can be applied to ornamentals to prevent various species of wildlife from destroying your expensive plants.

Some work and others don't. The good thing about using any chemical repellents is that on a golf course the superintendent, or another employee, will generally have a pesticide applicators permit to handle the product.

Ultimately, experimenting with plant repellents may cost you more than replacing the plant itself. So you're better off with more long-term solutions. While spraying pesticides to reduce insect damage – which should be done in conjunction to reduce stress on plants to keep them blooming and beautiful – you may stumble on one that helps with other critters. It's important to keep a journal or some other notations until you find a combination that works in more than one maintenance area.

a perfect shear on plant stems. Deer, on the other hand, only have lower incisors and their cut is only sheared from the lower side leaving a ragged edge on top from tearing off the rest of the flower.

Other uses for hardware cloth are to aid in the war on chipmunks. Chipmunks are notorious for digging and eating the bulbs of many ornamental flowers, thereby costing golf courses not only for annual flowers but also perennials.

Chipmunk holes are about 2 inches in diameter and are frequented throughout the day. Obviously, these critters can be trapped. However, dead chipmunks in snap traps may not be

something golfers want to see. A better, long-term solution is to prevent them from taking up residence. The trick here is to prevent them from digging and that's where the hardware cloth comes in.

In each flower bed, in addition to a weed barrier, cut out a section of hardware cloth and stake it down. Holes can be cut with heavy-duty scissors or metal shears to plant seeds or potted plants. The galvanized wire will allow for the plants to grow while preventing chipmunks from digging at and accessing any roots and bulbs. This same strategy will also work for other diggers such as voles that have a tendency to dig shallow

tunnels through mulch and other soft soil.

Moles also dig tunnels, but are usually much deeper. So a shallow wire barrier would be ineffective. While moles, unlike voles, are carnivorous they usually aren't too much of a threat to ornamental flowers. However, it's their tunnels that become an issue for a course. **GCI**

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