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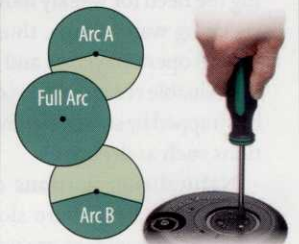
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RAIN BIRD

GONE NATIVE

How do you effectively control native areas that have gone wild? Is it time to bring back burning?

By John Torsiello

Beyond enhancing a golf course's aesthetics and imbuing a routing with added challenge for golfers, natural/native areas can prove a help to superintendents battling the bottom line.

Naturalized rough areas reduce the total acreage that must be maintained on an ongoing basis, eliminating the need for weekly mowing and reducing water usage, thus cutting overall operating costs and conserving valuable resources that can often be strapped by severe weather conditions such as drought.

Naturalizing portions of a golf course that has severe slopes, are rocky in character or are near water features also greatly reduces a superintendent's labor and stress levels.

Native areas, often quite pleasing to the eye and bursting with flora and fauna, show golf courses and superintendents to be what they truly are, good neighbors and stewards of the land, respectively.

While native areas are consider-

ably easier to maintain than the general playing surface, any good superintendent realizes you can't just make a portion of a golf course natural in character and then not pay any attention at all to it. Natural or native areas still need to be maintained to prevent them from quite literally going out of control with unwanted growth, or from invasive plant species and pests that can have damaging effects not only on the natural areas themselves but even, perhaps, the golf course as whole.

The Sagamore Club in Noblesville, Ind., has nearly 77 acres of natural areas that were seeded with a dunes mix that was predominately fine fescue, says Gary Myers, CGCS. Myers claims native areas are really no different than taking care of primary rough. The only difference is that the native areas are not irrigated and are not fertilized, which, he says, results in a significant cost savings.

"We still treat all 77 acres with a pre-emergent in the spring. We also apply post-emergent applications



ALL IMAGES: PETE DYE RIVER COURSE

Native areas, often quite pleasing to the eye and bursting with flora and fauna, show golf courses and superintendents to be what they truly are, good neighbors and stewards of the land, respectively.



Pete Dye River Course's Mark Cote, pictured below with Pete Dye, mows his native areas two times a year, in the spring and fall. He also treats the areas with a broadleaf weed control.



two to three times throughout the year. The main difference in controlling native area weeds compared to primary rough is the type of weeds you are trying to control.”

Myers' biggest weed problems in native areas are thistle, milkweed and annual grasses, such as foxtail.

“We are trying many different approaches this upcoming year in trying to control foxtail. We will be applying a barricade in the fall and coming back in the spring with a second application to hopefully help control this grass. This past year we tried to control foxtail with a post-emergent product that worked but was costly and you could still see the decaying plant in the native areas.”

Myers sprays all liquids in his course's native areas with two sprayers. “Even with all this effort, I believe that the native areas are not only important to the playability and toughness of the golf course but do save on money,” he says.

Jim Van Herwynen, CGCS, South Hills Country Club in Franksville, Wis., says of his course's 45 acres of native area, “Anyone who says they are maintenance free is a liar. They do require attention yearly for weed encroachment, noxious weeds, such as Canada thistle and garlic mustard, and also buckthorn.”

Yet, he reports, native areas “are a cost savings because we have minimal inputs – one or two herbicide applications per year and fuel for cutting them down to about 4 to 6 inches

in the late fall. The fuel savings of not cutting them once a week if we were to cut them as rough is substantial.”

He adds, “We typically do not fertilize them on an annual basis due to reduced budget numbers, however the edges along our rough do get fertilized once or twice a year and that probably gets in about 20 to 25 feet. We apply any leftover fertilizer at the end of the year to the areas that appear to be weaker than others.”

Van Herwynen shaves the areas down once a year in late fall with one employee using a brush cutter and tractor combo for about a week. “Weed control is essential as it can get out of control very quickly,” he says. “We have had problems with Canada thistle, so you have to get them sprayed with an herbicide once the thistles pop. We have had a few ant hills form in them as well that we try to bait periodically.”

Primland Resort's Highland Course was built on top of a ridge in the Blue Ridge Mountains area of southwestern Virginia in Stuart and has several significantly steep slopes. Creating native areas was an easy way to minimize mowing these areas, according to superintendent Brian Kearns.

“These areas are fairly difficult to maintain, but there is a cost savings from a fuel and fertilizer perspective,” he says.

Kearns and his staff mow the native areas once a year in September or October.

“One half pound of nitrogen is put out in these areas per year along with a crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide,” he says. “We use several post herbicides for the many broadleaves and saplings that are constantly popping up. We also use weedeaters, brush blades, and even hand pull the many weeds in these areas. We spot treat with insecticides to fight grub, cutworm, and chinch bug damage. We have some re-seeding to do each year due to insect damage.”

Kearns believes there are some misconceptions pertaining to natural areas.

“Our goal is to keep these areas having the tall, wispy, clean look, while keeping them lean and golfer-friendly (tall but thin enough to find a golf ball),” he says. “We are still trying to achieve this goal. Native areas are constantly trying to re-forest. Weeds and insects have made our task extremely difficult. We treat a few of these areas preventatively, but we mostly scout and treat curatively.”

Maintaining natural areas is not labor intensive, Kearns adds.

“We are not using a lot of labor mowing, he says. “Instead, we are using about half of the labor removing weeds, scouting and treating insects. Every year something new comes along and we find ourselves scratching our heads once again. We are constantly learning and thinking of new methods of maintaining these ‘low maintenance areas.’”

Glendon Junkin, superintendent at Turtle

Point Yacht and Country Club in Killen Ala., has about 35 acres of natural area on his course.

"We decided to plant many of the areas that were out of play in fescue and let it go natural," Junkin says. "This helped save money, gave some character to many of the holes, and provided wild life habitat for our Audubon certification. I Bush Hog the areas every September. That's it. I have 35 acres less to mow per week now than I did before, so there is fertilizer savings, labor savings, and fuel savings."

Mark Cote, superintendent at the Pete Dye River Course in Radford, Va., mows his native areas two times a year, in the spring and fall. "These areas also have to be treated with broadleaf weed control so that they are uniform and serve an aesthetic purpose as well as a design feature," Cote says. "The border/out of bounds areas are mowed three to four times a year in order to keep the woody plants from invading from the wood line. Our natural areas along the riverbank are mostly

manually maintained throughout the year to keep from becoming overgrown and thus losing their ability to filter any runoff."

Scott Roche, superintendent at Newport National Golf Club in Middletown, R.I., say his course's ownership and management views natural areas as vital to the facility.

"The areas are quite important to the overall aesthetics," Roche says. "Our golf course is wide open and flat without many trees, so they are a major feature."

He says maintenance practices in the native areas varies from year to year.

"Weeds are our biggest challenge and require mechanical removal and spot chemical application," Roche says. "If there were nothing done to maintain them, they would be cost saving. Natural areas are only as difficult to maintain as the budget allows them to be."

Roche mows Newport National's natural areas each fall and does not fertilize the areas. "We keep natural area margins away from known 'landing areas' as to not slow play," he says. "I would recommend to anyone looking to create naturalized areas to choose a seeding rate carefully and use entophyte-enhanced seed if possible."

He adds, "Natural areas may not be the cost saving areas that they are perceived to be. And the phrase 'naturalized area' can mean different things to different people. Every club is different and every budget is different, so depending on budget/labor and golfer expectations, they can be as cheap or expensive as one wants them to be to maintain."

What about burning as a means to manage natural areas?

The practice was once viewed as a low-cost,

"Burning can help but it also may be an opportunity for weeds to come in. It also must be done carefully and in coordination with local authorities, obviously." — Mark Cote, Pete Dye River Course



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effective way to control such areas and is still practiced by some. Burning is often initiated during spring as a way to control weeds and remove excessive organic material from grassland areas. Fire can stimulate seed germination, warm the soil and make nutrients more available.

Of course, the use of fire to control native areas must be approached with caution and planning. Burning may not be allowed in certain areas of the country and most municipalities require permits to burn, which may be difficult to obtain if the course is located

even somewhat close to residential or commercial property.

"A controlled burn could be an option," Roche says. "One would still need to quantify the cost/benefit to this practice in addition to adhering to the local laws."

Burning can help, Cote says, but it also may be an opportunity for weeds to come in. "It also must be done carefully and in coordination with local authorities, obviously," he adds

Van Herwynen would like to use fire to control his course's native areas but can't.

"Burning would definitely be the way to go in the fall due to the tremendous biomass that is produced yearly," he says. "But we cannot burn because we are in the city limits and surrounded by homes."

Kearns also considers burning an option, but probably not at Primland.

"Burning is a good solution in assisting with unwanted species," he says. "Unfortunately, our resort is on 12,000 acres of forest and burning scares me a bit. The wind always blows on the mountain top."

Establishing native areas on a new or exist-

Cote: "Our natural areas along the riverbank are mostly manually maintained throughout the year to keep from becoming overgrown and thus losing their ability to filter any runoff."



ing course can have significant benefits, but like issues pertaining to most turfgrass management it is not cut-and-dried.

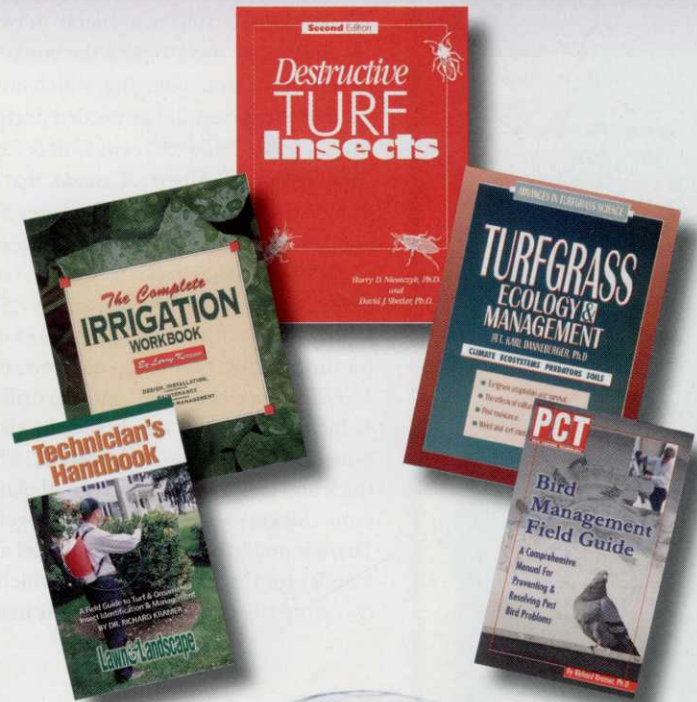
The misconception about native areas is that they require little to no yearly maintenance, Myers says. "If you do not keep up with weed control, native areas can soon become out of control," he says. "They then become more of a chore to have them looking kept. A lot depends on the expectations of your membership. The other misconception is that it takes little money to maintain once established. Again this depends on your membership. But we spend about \$7,000 to \$10,000 year maintaining our native areas. Still, there is a considerable savings considering if you had to spray, mow and irrigate the 77 naturalized acres we have." GCI

John Torsiello is a Torington, Conn.-based freelance writer.



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Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 41-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

Travels With Terry

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in hand. He shares helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits – as well as a few ideas of his own – with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.

BUNKER SLOPES ROLLER

These bunker rollers, available in two size widths, are used to pack the bunker faces to prevent balls from plugging, which are initially used in the spring and as-needed during the season at the Priddis Greens Golf & Country Club in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, that were designed and built in-house by Peter Kavanagh and James Beebe, golf course manager.

The 9-inch-wide roller used in the corners of the bunkers are made from used 1.5" square tubing from golf cart canopy support uprights for the handles, two 4" slip couplers, two 4"-x-2" reducers and a 2" end cap drilled out 3/4-inch diameter for the threaded rods, and a 4-inch-wide aluminum top plate 3/16th-inch-thick and two triangle-shaped end plates the same thickness that were welded together. There is one handle for the 9" model and two handles for the 18"-wide model, which also has two more slip couplers and a T-bar handle.



LIGHT IT UP

Jeff Jamnik, equipment manager, at the Great S/W Golf Club in Grand Prairie, Texas, got tired of using a flashlight or a corded light with magnet to see better while operating their 2006 Foley Accu-Pro Model #6320930 Reel Grinder. Jamnik purchased three Ulitech 34 3/4" T5 Florescent light fixtures from Home Depot and installed them on the top of the frame on both sides and one below the doors facing upwards. They are linked-together and plug right into the grinder light plug supplied by Foley which is located behind the control panel, which are turned on and off automatically when the machine is being used or turned off. The lights are attached with double stick tape and the wires are placed inside of a black plastic loom, which are attached with plastic clips and tape sized to the clips. The cost for materials was about \$150 and the labor time was about three hours. **GCI**



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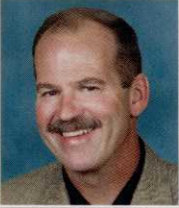
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IS IT PAYDAY YET?

At the risk of being a Scrooge right before Christmas, I think we need to talk about money for a bit.

No, I'm not referring to that bunker renovation you've been delaying until the drapes in the clubhouse are paid off. I'm talking about personal income.

According to the American Payroll Association, 72 percent of U.S. households live paycheck to paycheck. I'll let that sink in: nearly three-quarters of us can't pay our next round of bills until we get paid ourselves. That's a stunning revelation in the world's richest nation.

I not ashamed to say I live like that. I'm pretty good at a few things (writing, talking and pissing off GCSAA), but personal financial management has never been one of them. I've always had good jobs, but I've either lived beyond my means or didn't have the means to live the way I'd like.

Sound familiar?

I'm pretty sure most of you reading this are in better financial shape than me, but there are probably plenty of you sitting their thinking, "Hey, I guess I'm not alone in worrying about payday." Credit cards have been the Devil's toys for many of us. I cringe every time I see one of those Chase commercials showing cluelessly happy people essentially saying, "I need that widget now and I don't care if I'll be paying for it for 20 years!" Been there, done that, got the single-digit credit rating to prove it.

Then there's the failure to save. My investment portfolio largely consists of carefully bundled stacks of priceless, mint-condition Pokeman cards and boxes upon boxes of \$50 video cartridges that my boys absolutely had to have for gaming systems that have since gone the way of the dodo. In short, I tended to lavish useless plastic crap on my kids rather than teaching them that saving a little and eventually going to college someday was a wee bit more important than the newest version of Super Mario Brothers.

But, our financial situations – good or bad – are one thing. Consider the plight of your crew for a minute.

They are very likely part of that vast majority who are living hand-to-mouth. Yes, you pay them a good wage for a solid day's work, but no one is going to get ahead at \$12 an hour. And a salary of \$36,000 a year for an assistant isn't terrible if you're 24 years old and single, but not so much if you're 30 and married with a kid at home.

Let's face it: very few facilities are in a position to do much more than cost-of-living increases and even those are rare these days. Did you get an in-

interaction for three solid days. Even more amazing – no Syngenta product pitches, no speeches about sticking with proprietary brands and no sales guys working the meals and breaks. It was business school, not business development.)

Among the simple things that help motivate when money is tight:

- **Communicate:** Talk and listen more actively and frequently than normal. Engage them to find out how they would make little changes to improve procedures and the workplace. Interact face-to-face as much as you can.
- **Have some fun:** Playing blower-

I've always had good jobs, but I've either lived beyond my means or didn't have the means to live the way I'd like.

crease in the past few years? Bet most of you are saying, "Hell no!" right now.

So, whatever your salary issues might be, you definitely can't just wave a magic wand and make your employees' financial challenges go away. But there are ways to try to keep employees engaged and motivated when raises just aren't an option.

During the Syngenta Business Institute at Wake Forest University late last month, some very smart professors from the school's MBA program, helped 28 superintendents from around the nation examine that very problem. Motivating employees was just part of the remarkable curriculum Syngenta put together for a group selected from a pool of very qualified applicants.

(By the way, being a big Syngenta customer was not one of the key qualifications. Instead, the selection process focused more on finding superintendents who could truly benefit from management, leadership and financial education at a high level. I sat amazed at the quality of the teaching and the

ball (think soccer with back-pack blowers) or throwing some burgers on the barbecue doesn't cost much.

- **Give little attaboys:** There are few things more powerful than a simple, hand-written note on an employee's birthday, work anniversary or in recognition of a job well done. This one rang home with me because I've been preaching it for years.

- **Break out gift cards:** Surprising good employees with something as cheap and simple as a \$10 gift card to McDonalds or Starbucks goes a heckuva lot farther than just \$10.

Living from paycheck to paycheck is no longer the exception to the rule. But, you can make it a rule to find ways to keep your people motivated and focused until payday rolls around. It's good for them and good for you.

So, here's my challenge: This holiday, find one special low-cost thing for your team, then drop us a note to tell us how it was received and we'll highlight your idea for everyone. Your small thing might be a big idea for your peers around the nation. **GCI**