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CONSTRUCTION



Above: Devastating flood damage to Onion Creek Club's golf course. Left: Onion Creek Club's grounds crew. Their hard work and dedication got the course cleaned up and back into shape.

where to start putting the courses back together.

He borrowed some equipment from Onion Creek Club's sister clubs – three of which are within an hour and half's drive from south Austin – and, because all his equipment and tools had been washed away, spent about \$1,000 at the home improvement store up the street for shovels and rakes and anything to help with the cleanup.

"We started out just moving debris so we could just get around the golf course," Crump says. His crew then worked to clear some of the trash and material that was left in the

course's trees by the raging water. The debris pile eventually grew to a massive mound some 15 feet high.

The initial goal was to get at least some of the course ready for play, both to bring some money into the club and to help rebuild the pride and psyche of the battered neighborhood.

"Only three holes on the high side of the course's Crenshaw nine had been affected," Crump says. "We tackled the issues with those holes first because we were determined to get that nine open as soon as we could to show some tangible evidence of recovery."

The crew worked 10 hour

days, through wind and rain and ice and the short days of winter, to get the course back into shape. The Crenshaw nine was open for play by Thanksgiving, just four weeks after the floods.

Then the real work began, with the goal of having all 18 holes on the North course open by the end of the year. Backhoes and grapples were brought in and the crew focused on cleaning up, piling debris away, re-grading, shaping and trying the smooth out the course as much as was possible.

The putting surfaces were seeded with rye in nine days and got a little break from the

weather that allowed the grass to grow in relatively fast.

"We had to play off a temporary green on the 16th hole because the actual green was pretty ripped up by the floods," Crump says. "We used some sod from our nursery green that was hung up in the trees and recovered to form the temporary green. It took about 800 pounds of seed to tack the temp green because the only thing to seed it in was the silt and mud from the flood."

Crump's crew also reworked all 55 bunkers on the north course in two months after all the drainage was ripped out of them by the floods. "We thought if the bunkers and greens are good then it would help deflect some of the problems on the edges of the course that we are still working on," he says.

The North course reopened by Christmas Day. Yes, there were some bare lies and some bumps on the greens, and some plastic bags and tires and trash still hung from trees 40 feet above the level of the now docile creek, but golf was being played.

"The staff and crew took the bull by the horns and went to work, showing their pride for the golf course and their desire to get it back to where it once was," Crump says. He carries a crew of 10-12 workers in the non-growing season and 18 in the spring, summer and early fall. He used as many as 25 workers during the first two months of course cleanup.

Another hurdle had been crossed but there is still plenty of work to be done. Since December, the crew has been focused on general upkeep and maintenance of the 18 holes that are open while continuing

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the cleanup of the most damaged parts – the low-lying areas of the original nine.

LIKE A PHOENIX

The club announced in March that reconstruction of the original nine had begun and set a goal on July 1 for there to be golf played on those nine holes again. The plans include rebuilding some greens and reshaping others, sanding and sprigging the grass with Tif Eagle and to replace the Tif-Dwarf Bermuda that has been on the putting surfaces since the course was founded.

When play begins on the reworked holes, the golf experience will be quite different. All

the underbrush that insulated the course from noise is gone, making some of the original course's holes that were once tree-lined look nearly links-like and hundreds of trees were uprooted and have not been replaced.

After the original nine is finished the attention will turn to the course that's currently open, shutting down nine holes at a time to assure there is always 18 holes in play.

To help pay for the renovation, the club, which has about 410 golfers among its membership of just more than 800, is offering a special drive for members. Every current member has been given two

certificates, each with a value of \$5,000 towards the purchase of a new golf membership, to pass along to a friend, neighbor or business associate. The certificate covers the entire initiation fee, allowing the referrals to join Onion Creek Club for free.

The Dominion Golf Group, which operates six clubs including Onion Creek Club, is known for its innovative membership offerings. Its focus is on signing dues-paying members rather than assigning expensive initiation fees. More members paying dues means more money for the clubs for the long haul, and that tack will surely be put to use.

The ultimate goal for Crump

and his crew at Onion Creek Club is to put the course back to where it was and even going a step further by returning the course's putting surfaces returning to their original edges as designed by Demaret and, later, by Crenshaw.

"If there is an upside to what's happened it's that we are going to be able to restore the course to the way it is really supposed to be," Crump says. "Now that the trees have been thinned out it will help us get sunlight to the places where we were having trouble before the flood. Everything that was the golf course at Onion Creek will be the golf course at Onion Creek again." **GC**

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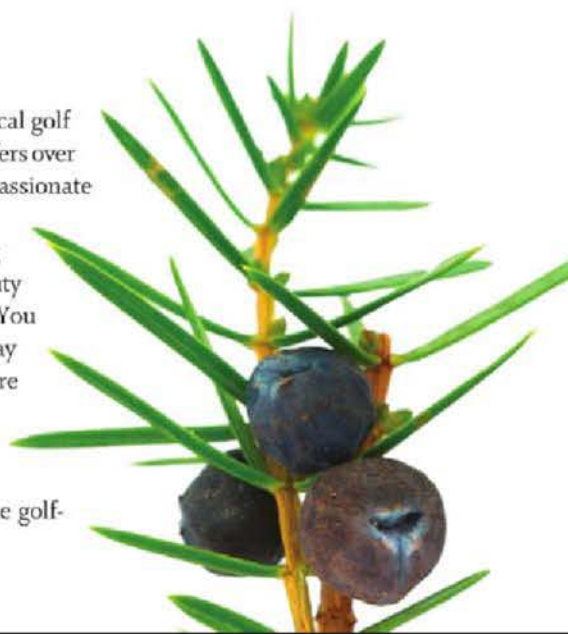
FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

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-





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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



“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 that you wouldn't normally have to buy year after year.”

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.

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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**

Joseph Cea owns C&C Wildlife Management, Delmar, N.Y. (www.ccwildlife.com). With two degrees in wildlife management and 19 years of experience he has been assisting residences and business, including local golf courses, with nuisance wildlife issues with safe, humane and practical techniques.



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