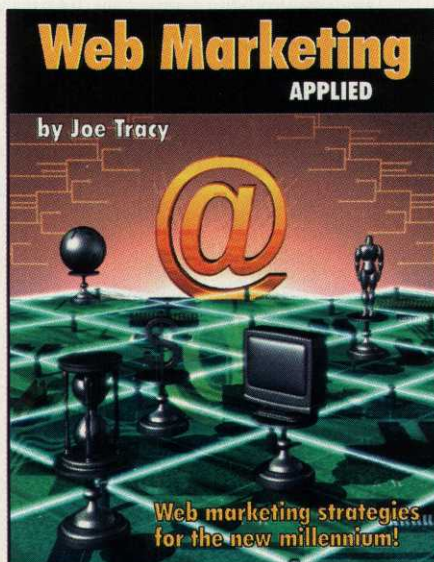


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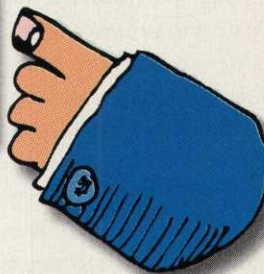
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# Tips

## → Creating a Naturalized Golf Course

### Courses Can Become Habitats for a Variety of Plants, Wildlife

By Arthur Milberger

**L**andscape naturalization is an old concept that is receiving renewed attention, particularly as it relates to golf course management.

In the 1990s, a decade of heightened environmental awareness, the industry made advances in promoting environmental issues and reform. Some golf course design and maintenance professionals responded by naturalizing courses. Since then, naturalization has become more widespread.

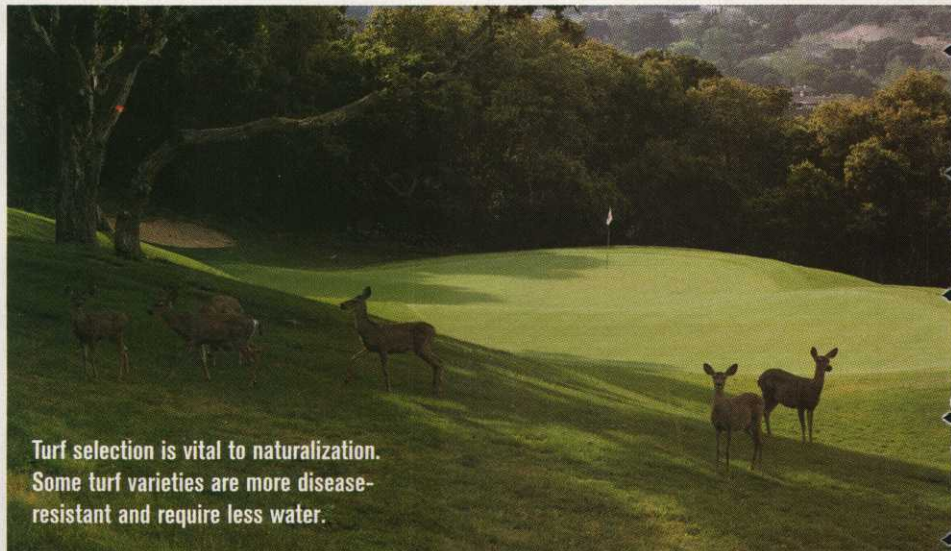
By carefully selecting and maintaining turfgrass, trees and other vegetation, course staffs have created natural habitats



on their courses for a breadth of flora and fauna. In time, these elements of a naturalized course become fairly self-sustaining — without interfering with golf. Besides being good for play and wildlife management, golfers often find this type of course to be an interesting and attractive alternative to the traditional course. Further, industry professionals appreciate it as an opportunity to reduce maintenance requirements.

“Since naturalization, golfer response to our course has been overwhelmingly positive,” says Dan Dinelli, superintendent of North Shore CC in Glenview, Ill. “We like that the course is more self-sufficient than it was before.”

A golf course has qualities that make it a prime setting for naturalization. Properly designed, it can be a sanctuary for bird species and an area of prairie or wetland preservation. Entire food chains can exist on and near it — from microor-



**Turf selection is vital to naturalization. Some turf varieties are more disease-resistant and require less water.**

ganisms and insects to amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

“Diverse wildlife is vital to a naturalized course,” says Mike Sandburg, superintendent of Lakeside CC, a naturalized course in downtown Houston. “Our course is home to opossums and armadillos, and birds such as great blue herons, peregrine falcons and Egyptian geese. We’ve found that golfers take greater pleasure in the course’s unique natural beauty and relaxing scenery.”

In addition to environmental benefits, a naturalized golf course offers financial benefits. Because a naturalized course attempts to preserve a region’s natural landscape, a superintendent can save money by reducing plant and turfgrass maintenance, as well as fertilizer use.

“Our course has reduced pesticide and labor requirements, making it cheaper to maintain,” says Mark Egan, superintendent of the naturalized course at Hyannisport Club in Hyannis Port, Mass.

#### Charting the course

Here are tips to develop a naturalized course. They are founded on common goals: to establish diverse plant and animal life and to let nature run your course as much as possible.

■ **Select plants that thrive in the area and are compatible with the soil type and exposure.**

Choose a variety of plants, since diverse vegetation is crucial to any naturalized course.

■ **Carefully research turfgrass to determine which will work best for your course.**

There are many sources of information, including sod producers, local universities with programs in turfgrass research, area extension services and other superintendents. In consulting these resources, consider the course’s geographic region, its climate and the course areas targeted for sodding. Be sure to inquire extensively as to each variety’s drought and insect resistances, as well as fertilizer and mowing requirements.

At Lakeside CC, common bermudagrass in fairways and roughs was replaced with a hybrid 419 bermudagrass, which developed more rapidly and grew denser and greener than the common bermudagrass. The new turf provides more durable and instant coverage. It permitted golf play sooner and allowed Lakeside workers to focus more closely on naturalization practices instead of tending to the turf during its grow-in stage.

For out-of-play areas at Lakeside, course managers decided on buffalograss sod.

"Buffalograss is nature's turf of choice for our area," Sandburg says. "Between 150 and 200 years ago, this variety grew rampant across the Southern plains without any human assistance. It makes sense to use it on our naturalized course."

Buffalograss, with less need for fertilizer and pesticide, needs little maintenance and has a high drought tolerance.

Fescues are the grass of choice for the out-of-play areas at Hyannisport Club, Egan says.

"Our course is located on the saline Atlantic flyway of Cape Cod," Egan adds. "Because of their high tolerance for sea salts, fescues have thrived here."

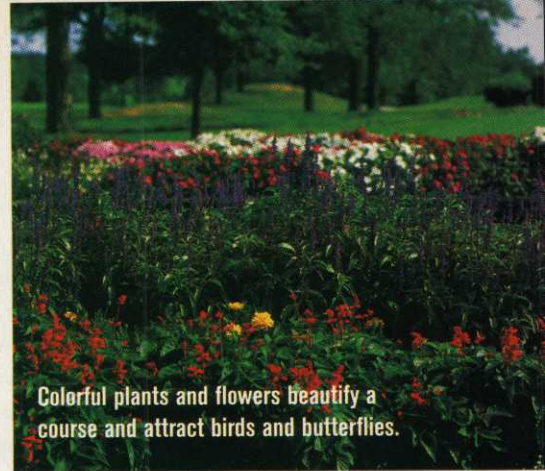
Designers of the Lakeside course replaced Tifdwarf on the greens with a newer Tifdwarf variety that grows more slowly, minimizing the disruption of habitats that frequent mowing can cause. It also means less maintenance.

An L93/Crenshaw blend was installed

on the greens at Carolina National GC in Bolivia, N.C. "This variety is lower growing, more disease resistant and more water thrifty than other varieties used on greens, which makes it a low-maintenance grass that's well-suited for naturalization," says Matthew Mays, the course's environmental specialist.

In some cases, a naturalized course will "decide" for itself what grasses work best. At Lakeside, Sandburg says workers planted zoysiagrass on bunker faces, thinking it would reduce mowing and maintenance requirements. But Houston's high humidity promoted disease in the susceptible zoysiagrass over time and weakened it. Eventually, the hybrid 419 Bermudagrass overtook the bunker faces because it has stronger resistance to the diseases common to that region, Sandburg says.

■ **In addition to selecting appropriate plant materials, take steps to attract wildlife.** Colorful plants and flowers should draw na-



Colorful plants and flowers beautify a course and attract birds and butterflies.

tive birds and butterflies. Mounted and monitored nest boxes will also bring birds to the area, and brush piles offer appealing shelter to larger animals.

"The unique ecosystems located at Hyannisport, coupled with our efforts to promote wildlife, have drawn various animals to the course, including rabbits, foxes and osprey," Egan says.

In some cases, wildlife residing on a naturalized course will contribute to the course's maintenance. "The wood ducks and mallards we released onto the course help keep our ponds clean by feeding on excess floating vegetation," Dinelli says.

*Continued on page 64*

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## Tips

*Continued from page 63*

"There used to be a massive nutria [a water-dwelling rodent] population that was destroying our lake banks, but the presence of natural predators like coyotes has solved that problem," Sandburg says. "Likewise, purple marlins and bats have almost eliminated our troubling mosquito season."

■ **Don't forget to use the resources that nature provides.** Retain indigenous vegetation that will enhance the course, and minimize disturbance to pre-existing earth and water formations. Such formations may be useful in shaping the course. During construction, minimize wildlife disruption.

### Making the process simpler

Golf and environmental organizations are taking steps to encourage the naturalization practice, and research and technology are making the process simpler.

Since 1991, Audubon International, a non-profit environmental organization, has worked in cooperation with the U.S. Golf Association to promote the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for golf courses. The program shows superintendents how to include environmental solutions in their management practices, and has helped more than 2,300 courses further their benefits to local environments without detracting from the advancement of golf.

Another major step in promoting naturalization has been creation of the "Environmental Principles for Golf Courses in the United States." A collection of organizations, including the USGA, the GCSAA, the National Wildlife Federation and the EPA, developed this set of voluntary guidelines for environmentally aware golf course creation, maintenance and operation.

Recent advancements in mapping and imaging technology allow designers to preserve a course's natural ecosystem. Modern satellite remote-sensing technology creates precise relief images of an area. A designer uses these models to plan a course that fits the site's topography, preserves waterways and minimizes disruption of habitats.

Turfgrass development also is making progress. The USGA Green Section funds the Turfgrass and Environmental Research Program, which is the world's largest private turfgrass research effort. The project promotes development of new turfgrass varieties with improved properties, such as higher water retention, reduced pesticide requirements and more efficient fertilizer use.

Independent turfgrass breeders, too, are working to cultivate grasses that are better suited for applications such as naturalization. "For example, breeders are contributing by developing grasses with endophytes, which have natural insect-controlling properties," Dinelli says. ■

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*Arthur Milberger is a sod producer with Turfgrass America and a board member of Turfgrass Producers International in Rolling Meadows, Ill. He can be reached at [arthur@milberger.com](mailto:arthur@milberger.com).*

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After an enjoyable eighteen holes of golf, a man stopped in a bar for a beer before heading home. There he struck up a conversation with a ravishing young beauty. They had a couple of drinks, liked each other, and soon she invited him over to her apartment. For two hours they made mad, passionate love.

On the way home, the man's conscience started bothering him something awful. He loved his wife and didn't want this unplanned indiscretion to ruin their relationship, so he decided the only thing to do was come clean.

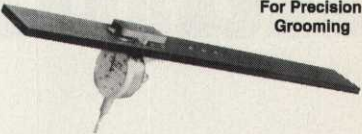
"Honey," he said when he got home, "I have a confession to make. After I played golf today, I stopped by the bar for a beer, met a beautiful woman, went back to her apartment and made love to her for two hours. I'm sorry, it won't ever happen again. I hope you'll forgive me."

His wife scowled at him and said, "Don't lie to me, you sorry scumbag! You played thirty-six holes, didn't you?"

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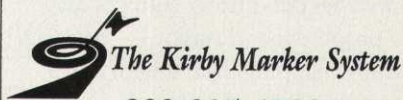
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# hammocks

**I**t's often difficult to determine who deserves credit for the world's most earth-shattering discoveries, so the question of who deserves credit for arguably the greatest innovation in leisuredom — the hammock — is shrouded in mystery.

Scholars of ancient Greece will tell you a Socratic disciple named Alcibiades invented it. Others would argue the Mayans invented the hammock in the 11th century.

We mere mortals can't answer the question of who's responsible, but we can undoubtedly still benefit from the ingenuity displayed by *someone*, be that person Greek, Mayan or Martian. As the dog days of summer grind on us, the necessity for outdoor rest grows greater, and a hammock remains the best way to wile away an afternoon.

Purists — a polite name for the stodgy — will tell you a hammock must be made of cotton, set between two large trees at a distance of 15 feet and placed at a height of four feet to be truly enjoyed. While there is nothing misguided nor technically wrong with such an assertions, most normal folks don't have two big trees that are the perfect distance apart.

Furthermore, to limit a hammock to one location potentially has harmful effects — namely lack of shade during certain parts of the day, splotches of bird droppings and an obscuring of blue sky.



## THE HAMMOCK IS THE GREATEST INNOVATION IN THE HISTORY OF LEISUREDOM

BY MARK LUCE

I say this as a reformed hammock purist. For my 30th birthday, I bought myself a hammock stand, and the difference is amazing. Now I can haul my hammock to various locations in the yard, adjusting on the fly to weather conditions, sunlight and my purpose for relaxation — be it reading, napping, listening to a ball game or imbibing in an early evening libation.

A decent cotton hammock and stand will run about \$150 with the higher end costing around \$250 to \$300. But there are some amenities that you simply can't do without, such as a set of wheels (around \$16) that connect to one end of the stand that makes moving it easier, a plush pillow and an outdoor table to place

your drink, book, cigar or snack. As in all things, proper preparation will ensure you don't have to make an extra trip to the house.

And, of course, there are some hammock no-nos. Cordless or cellular phones and pagers are particularly discouraged, since there is no need for interruption during your leisure time.

Likewise, one should bring the hammock inside and disassemble the stand in winter (unless you live in Southern climes) to prevent wear, tear and rust.

In my never-ending quest for the perfection of the good life, the simple act of lying in a hammock — with the seduction of the shade and the perpetual invitation to nap — ranks as the most versatile and enjoyable of leisure activities known to humans.

Its ancestry is intriguing, but ultimately, it's not as important as lying back, sipping on a gimlet and doing absolutely nothing.

*Mark Luce is a free-lance writer who lounges in his hammock in Lawrence, Kan.*

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