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The niche of the Horticulturist

BY HANNAH SCHRUM

Here's how a horticulturist—part ecologist, soil scientist, florist, pest manager and artist—can help at your course.



No one expects the neighborhood teenage boy hired to cut the lawn to provide immaculate PGA Tour quality results.

In the same spirit it is unreasonable to expect a botanic garden to sprout beneath a crew member who has been tasked with planting a few marigolds around the clubhouse.

For the superintendent looking to add a signature element to the grounds of the golf course beyond the turf, consider seeking assistance from an expert horticulturist. Just as superintendents wield years of academic and practical experience to produce turf that is of professional quality, so too does the horticulturist enter the profession with a similar

level of expertise and the ability to provide top-grade ornamental landscape management.

Horticulture 101

Horticulture itself (which turf management is a branch) is defined as the science and art of growing plants. And yet the title horticulturist remains vague and almost foreign in its inability to convey the duties of the profession.

The job description of the horticulturist is often simply described as “playing with flowers all day.” In reality, the job entails a diverse skill set to be employed as the successful horticulturist that is part ecologist, soil scientist, florist, crew manager, pest manager, artist, buyer,

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Strategically placed plants can make an impact on visitors. By finding locations to group plants, a memorable display can be achieved with a limited budget.

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pathologist and public gardener. The golf course horticulturist is a niche role, still novel in the golf maintenance industry, but an increasing number of superintendents are finding the many benefits of staffing an expert in this position to help refine and polish the grounds beyond the turf.

In economic terms, the horticulturist adds an appealing value-added aesthetic to the grounds in a way that both com-

Ornamental horticulture is the eye-catching, agronomic icing on the cake. The golf course...is a place people go to...[enjoy] the outdoors.



plements and reflects the design of the course. The first impressions and curb appeal conveyed by expertly landscaped grounds reflects well on the facility. Isn't it a terrible dichotomy to maintain an immaculate turf if the clubhouse is weed-ridden and wholly forgettable?

Ornamental horticulture is the eye-catching, agronomic icing on the cake. The golf course, after all, is a place people go to with the anticipation of enjoying the outdoors in a beautifully manicured environment. The astute superintendent will realize that enhanced landscapes attract more than bees and butterflies — they attract member satisfaction. Golfers are an audience that are already attuned to the detail of the cut and roll of each green, approach and fairway. Something as simple as a few hundred tulip bulbs is the sort of dramatic flair that they appreciate and welcome enthusiastically.

The public gardener

The work of a horticulturist involves more than creating visual botanical thrills. The wide skill set can be utilized to increase the sustainability of the golf course and club-

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SEVEN TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Follow these tips to increase the quality of the ornamental plant beds on any golf course:

- 1** Embrace using annuals to achieve quick and showy results that stay the whole season.
- 2** Find a good local garden center that will give you reliable plant advice. Your friendly fertilizer salesperson may be glad to sell wholesale flats of marigolds to you, but your local garden center may be able to make a better suggestion for your location. Yes, you will pay a premium for these, but you will typically get stronger plants and finer varieties. The key in successful garden design lies in attention to detail. Starting with Grade-A quality plants will get noticed.
- 3** Once you have planted the ornamentals don't forget them! Apply liquid fertilizer every two to three weeks and make sure the beds are irrigated reliably.
- 4** Bulbs are easy to grow and always a crowd pleaser. Wholesale vendors offer many unusual varieties that double the crowd-pleasing factor.
- 5** Identify shrubs before pruning. Prune flowering shrubs such as hydrangeas, azaleas, Chinese fringe flower, quince and forsythias at the correct time (dictated by the type of shrub, not relegated to slow season cleanup tasks) to enhance flowering in the current season or preserve flowering in the following season.
- 6** Containers are a fast way to make a classy impression and show off flare. They are also easy to maintain through the season.
- 7** If you can't invest in landscaping vast areas between the parking lot and clubhouse, then pick one or two high impact, highly visible spots to focus on. A few pansies planted over a half dozen areas around the clubhouse will barely get noticed. Plant 10 flats of pansies in one spot and the affect will be memorable. Quality of design and plant matter will get noticed and your praise will be sung all season long.

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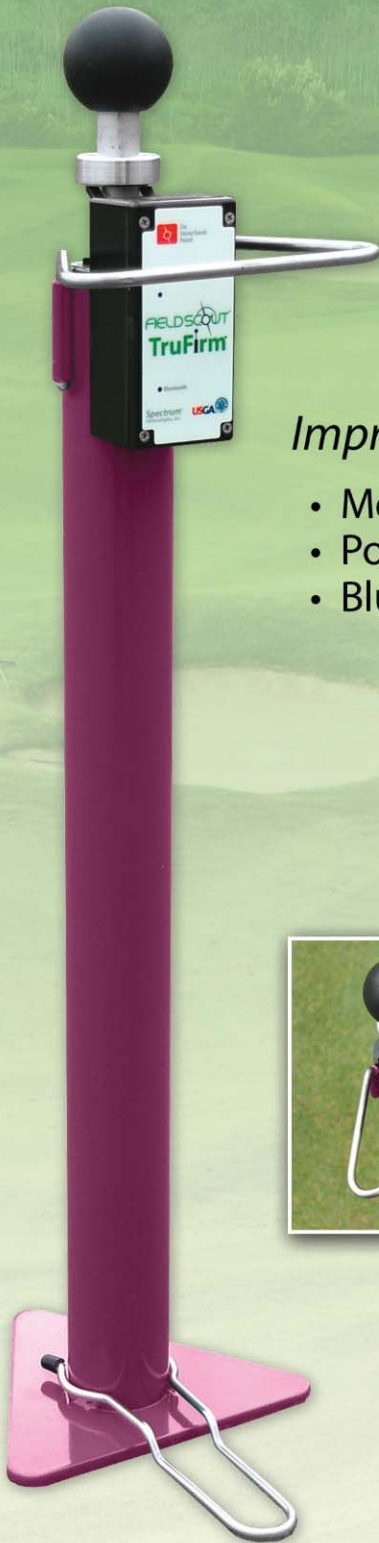
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Placing plants within decorative containers is one way to dress up an area easily. Use of annual plants is also a simple way to spruce up spaces around the course.



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house on the whole. For example, fresh herbs and greens can easily be cultivated for the club restaurant. And flowers cut from the grounds can serve double duty as fresh bouquets for special events. Furthermore, a seasoned horticulturist can increase the sustainability of some maintenance operations by weighing in on cost-saving landscaping decisions. Well-advised plant choices can save thousands in mulch and labor costs over just a few seasons.

In addition to the tangible and quanti-

tative results served by the horticulturist, his/her role as public gardener provides a unique opportunity to connect with members and guests of the golf course. Unlike the golf maintenance team, who are diligent in completing their work so that they remain (mostly) out of sight/out of the way of golfers, the horticulturist working on the club side of the grounds is highly visible and approachable to members. This daily interaction with members fosters a positive perception that the golf course is under the care of proactive and detail ori-

ented management.

A horticulturist can provide the crown jewel to the golf course by weaving landscape elements that captivate and delight members while enhancing their outdoor experience. While not every superintendent is able to invest in hiring a horticulture specialist outright, even a small plant budget combined with some tips (see sidebar) for success can provide commendable results in beautifying the grounds. 📍

Hannah Schrum is the horticulturist at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove in Arden, N.C.



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Each year, people go through the same routine. They make promises. They promise to exercise, to eat better or to cut out their vices in the year to come. However, these promises are usually forgotten before spring showers have rolled in. New Year's resolutions have a knack for being hollow, but they don't have to be for everyone. ¶ We spoke with five superintendents about their New Year's resolutions for 2014 and whether they think the resolutions will stick. Their resolutions varied from family and increased patience, to cutting soda and having more fun.



Finding time for fun can be ridiculously difficult sometimes. As children we play like it's our job, but then we get real jobs and there's no more carefree playtimes in our schedules. For Ryan Bourne, working a little playtime into his life is his goal for the next year. "I'm buried in my own work and I need time for myself and I don't give myself enough time," says Bourne.

Adding onto the idea of me-time, Bourne says he needs to work on delegation with his crew and gaining another perspective on the course. "I rarely see the golf course from a golfer's perspective instead of just driving in a golf cart, driving by, seeing something and knowing that it needs fixed." In the spirit of walking a mile in someone else's shoes, Bourne wants to see the course from the golfer's eyes. Don't worry, he won't be stealing anyone's shoes, but instead plans on playing with a variety of groups. "I'm going to try playing at least once a week with the groups and members that we have and there's different generations of golfers that I want to get their perspective," says Bourne. He even wants to join the

women on the course for their perspective.

Bourne admits that he's made resolutions every year with little success. "I've tried quitting tobacco, working out, nothing's worked out so far, so I'm praying this'll work." He predicts a seventy percent success rate.

While having fun on the course, Bourne knows that stepping into the golfer's shoes allows him to bridge the gap between his crew and golfers. "If I'm out there, it's another way of communicating what we're doing, why we're doing it and just for me personally, playing would give me that vision of what a golfer is seeing," says Bourne.



Scott Hall is focusing on being more of a family man in 2014. "I would say the biggest thing I would like to resolve for New Year's, is being able to spend and find more time for my family and my kids," says Hall. The father of four kids, Hall doesn't want to miss out. Time flies by and as Hall says, "eventually those days are going to be long gone and I won't be able to get them back."

Resolutions are fairly new territory for Hall, who says he hasn't really made them in the past. "Most of the time I can never stick to them. They don't really seem as important to me at the time, but going back to family, that's the most important thing to me." One challenge Hall acknowledged was the busy nature of the industry. Getting caught up in work is pretty easy for him, as it is for many superintendents, but Hall knows that paying attention to family now is vital.

Despite being a rookie in the resolution department, Hall feels he will hit this one out of the park without a problem. "Like I said, you only get one chance as a parent to be with your kids and you know you can look at pictures all you want, but if you miss out on those memories personally, you can't get them back."



Patience may be a virtue, but sometimes you just can't help but tear your hair out from frustration. Jeff Smelser's resolution this year will require patience. Smelser aims to be

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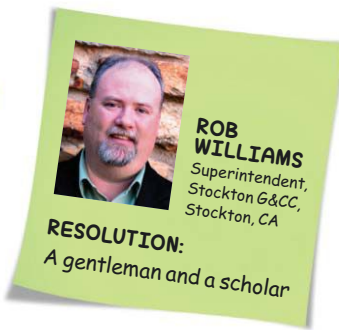
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a better husband and father. He also wants to be a "better Christian and to try to be more successful in dealing with my members and my guests that play at my club," says Smelser.

On the home front, Smelser is more in need of patience now with a teenage daughter. "Well, my daughter is going to be sixteen years old, she's going to start driving this year, so I have to be more patient with her." Along with the terrors of a teen driver, his daughter has begun to plan for college, picking schools that are eight or nine hours away. Sighing deeply, Smelser says he knows he will need to be understanding with her. Along with plan-

ning for the future with his daughter, Smelser says he needs to improve his listening skills with his wife after a long day on the course. "I don't want to come home and get into detailed conversations, but I have to," says Smelser.

Past attempts at resolutions have been hit and miss. "I always try to make resolutions to lose weight, but I quit smoking three years ago. That's the last one that really worked. It'll be four years this year." This success has proven to Smelser that he can keep a New Year's resolution. "It always helps now that I quit smoking because I know I can achieve my resolution," says Smelser.



Picking up more knowledge is hardly ever a bad thing and for Rob Williams, it is one of his goals for 2014. "I think this year's New Year's resolution would be to further educate myself and to become a better manager," says Williams.

This is not the first time Williams has resolved to educate himself as the new year rings in. He says that this is a goal he has had success with in the past. Seeking out new educational opportunities in 2013, Williams was happy to be one of 25 superintendents invited to the Syngenta Business Institute in early December. He hopes to utilize some of the lessons from the conference at work. "We [were] talking about different cultural things, also trying to manage a little better through out the staff, be a lot better at budget presentation and communicating better with my club to make them understand a little better what our needs are for our golf course," says Williams.

He already is planning for more studying next year. "I've actually already aligned myself with some study, some different education opportunities, so hopefully [I'll] take them and put them into practice at work." These opportunities are something that Williams sees as valuable for his course, as well as a way to achieve his career goals. "Putting some of those education items into practice to try and further my career and also for the better-

ment of our department, will make our golf course a lot better," says Williams.



Getting rid of carbonated beverages can be a popular resolution. Greg Shaffer will be one of many to cut soda out of his diet this year. However his motivation isn't health related. "Every year I try to do something a little bit goofy. I've given up fast food in the past, not necessarily because I need to do it, but I like the challenge of just [seeing] if I can get it done," says Shaffer.

His resolution will test his will power, but he thinks that being hard headed will help. This isn't the first time he has tried to tackle soda as a resolution. "I've done soda before and that usually works out pretty well, but it can be a little difficult at times, especially when you need some caffeine. You have to fall back on coffee."

For Shaffer the purpose of a new year's resolution is not focusing on one detailed goal, but a broader test for himself. "Usually, I set some personal goals for myself that I try to keep to myself, whether it's work relate or family related, but usually there's one kind of goofy thing that I try to do for myself that makes it a little more challenging," says Shaffer. ©

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