



An Architect's Opinion

DEVELOPING SPACE BY TREE PLANTING

By Bob Lohmann

Due to a combination of relatively flat topography, disease epidemics, and plant sales, golf courses have become major clients of tree sales business. Even though both the golf course and trees are natural parts of the environment, proper planning is needed to make them compatible with each other. Trees don't grow in turf, but instead grow naturally in the woods with other trees where there is no competition between the fine manicured turf and the fragile feeder roots of the trees. So, placing trees on the golf course requires more thought than just filling in the open spaces. All golfers need room to play the game, and all trees need room to mature. Through a mixture of tree groupings and open space, both the golf course and the trees can survive.

Overplanting is the easy way to place trees on the golf course. Just as in the entire golf course facility, trees should be part of a planning program that begins with the initial analysis and inventory, and leads to an overall planting and replanting plan. Before any trees are placed on a golf course, the existing plant material should be analyzed. To determine the importance of any particular tree, one must anticipate the life span, the potential size, and the present condition of the tree. If a group of specimen trees are interfering with an existing sand bunker, the out-of-play bunker should be removed, and the trees should remain. But when weedy and trash trees grow old and lose their branches adjacent to fairways, sand bunkers, or greens, they should be removed.

Trees provide the framework and background of the golf course. The best planting plans may be drawn in a day, but it takes many years and a lot of

work for a golf course to develop a mature woody look that does not inhibit the golfer's game. During this maturing process, a sense of direction, through a landscape space, is developed. The designer's intent is to control the visual experiences of the golfer while allowing the golfer to concentrate on the game.

A few well placed trees become important strategic elements of the golf course design. They can be used to define target areas and fairway turning points. But when too many trees get close to golfers, they become a nuisance. Along with destroying the original design of the golf course, the maintenance of an old tree is costly. Trees tend to prune themselves of small twigs throughout the year. They should be planted no closer than 30 to 40 feet from tees, greens, and fairways depending on the species of the plant and the design of the golf hole. Trees with high open crowns are ideal near and around tees and greens, while low branching trees and shrubs should be avoided.

Plantings can be done in small tight groups for immediate effect and mulched beneath to eliminate grass mowing. An uneven spacing gives the planting a natural look similar to what is found in the woods. Planting done in moderation, using a mixture of tree varieties, will avoid monotony while not overwhelming the golf course. If trees need to be close to the fairway, they should be clean, open-crowned trees planted far enough apart to allow room for maintenance equipment and golf play.

Remember that successful planting on a golf course demands skillful analysis, planning, and design, as well as a thorough knowledge of plants and golf design principles.

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