

ADDING FLOWERS TO THE GOLF COURSE LANDSCAPE

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Flowers for many years were almost exclusively in separate "flower gardens," whether in private yards, commercial landscapes or public gardens. Landscape architects and contractors traditionally relied on evergreens, deciduous trees and shrubs, turf and a few groundcovers. Flowers were reserved for the avid gardener, and flower gardens were an afterthought to the landscape design.

Times have changed! The fine line that once separated landscaping from gardening has blurred, and more flowers are being used everywhere — not just in flower beds, but as integral parts of the landscape. The increased use of low-maintenance annuals, perennials and bulbs can be seen in the landscapes of gardeners and non-gardeners alike, creating an urban environment that changes dramatically from one season to the next.

These changes are evident on golf courses, too. In the past, flowers were found only near the clubhouse. Bulbs added a spark of color in spring, and summer color was derived from sunny beds of marigolds and geraniums, and from shady beds of impatiens. Recently, the use of flowers on the golf course has expanded greatly. Many golf courses have added perennial gardens, wildflower plantings and non-traditional groundcovers. But even more exciting, there has been an increased emphasis on the use of flowers as specimens, much the same as shrubs have been used in the past.

Flowers have much to contribute to the golf course landscape. One obvious attribute is color — flowers offer an endless array of shades, hues and tints from early spring until hard frost. A second attribute is variety. Flowers vary tremendously in texture, color, size, shape, habit, season of flowering and foliar interest, making possible an infinite number of combinations. A third and perhaps more subtle attribute is the effect of that variety on the landscape. Flowers change dramatically

from one season to the next. A landscape of trees and shrubs can be quite constant, but a landscape using flowers changes constantly. Each season has its own look: a touch of color brightens the spring landscape, full color develops in summer, textures emerge in autumn, and the color of flowers gives way to the architecture of trees and shrubs in winter. This change can be a great asset on a golf course, relieving the sameness of the view from one week to the next throughout the season. Even the pros appreciate a change in the scenery!

Making the Selection

With thousands of annuals, perennials and bulbs available, it can be a challenge to select the right plant for the right place. There are several basic factors which you should consider first, however, and these factors will help you choose specific plants.

First, consider hardiness. Of course, this is not an issue when choosing annual flowers, but it is the single most important factor in selecting perennials and bulbs. Take the time to visit perennial nurseries and observe public and residential plantings to see what plants are hardy in your area. Check with a landscaper, garden designer, or better yet, a long-time local gardener. Catalogs can be quite misleading, since they classify plants by generalized hardiness zones. Be aware that some "hardy" plants require mulching over winter to survive, while others are reliably hardy with no protection at all.

Second, match the flowers to the environment. There is no flower for every location from dry shade to wet sun, but there is no single flower that is adaptable to all environments. Consider the soil (pH, soil temperature, nutrient levels, moisture levels, texture, drainage), temperature (frost dates, reflection of heat off buildings, diurnal fluctuation), light (intensity as well as duration), wind, precipitation and weed problems. It is far easier to manage

flowers that are planted in the proper environment than those planted in a location to which they cannot adapt.

Third, give top priority to plants that are low-maintenance. Remember that low-maintenance does not mean no-maintenance. Most flowers require more work than trees and shrubs. Most annuals, for instance, require dead-heading (removal of spent flowers to encourage rebloom) at least weekly throughout the season. Most perennials should be cut back after flowering. Some flowers need weekly pest control, some require seasonal pruning, several benefit from staking. None of these maintenance needs should in and of itself eliminate a plant from your list, but they should be considered before plant selection.

Fourth, aim for long-lived perennials and bulbs and full-season annuals. Most perennials flower for only a few weeks during the summer, but their value in the landscape increases with age. Short-lived perennials may perform well for one or two years but decline or die in subsequent years, making them fairly high-cost plants. Some bulbs are quite permanent, lasting for many years, while others become weak after only one or two years. With the high cost of installing bulbs, it's worth taking the time to select those that will last for many years. Many annuals will flower over the entire summer, but some will stop flowering in the heat, and others require pruning and deadheading to promote season-long flowering. Still others will burn out and die before the end of summer, leaving a bare spot in the landscape. Visit public gardens and trial gardens sponsored by seed companies and the All-America Selections organization to evaluate new annuals for performance. Wisconsin is fortunate to have several excellent public gardens, trial gardens, and an official site for All-America Selections evaluation — make use of them!

Fifth, consider how long and at what time of year flowers are effective. Some annuals, like impatiens, flower the entire season with very little if any maintenance. On the other hand, most perennials flower for less than a month, but many have excellent foliage and form for the entire season. Some perennials, like several of the ornamental grasses, are effective even in winter. Match your needs with what the plant

offers.

Sixth, always consider function before beauty. Remember that a golf course exists primarily for the game of golf. Flowers should not interfere with that game. Flower beds and borders should be placed near the clubhouse where the public can observe their beauty, or between holes and out of play. On the other hand, the course can be beautified through the judicious placement of flowers among shrub and tree borders, along fences and near benches.

Suggested Uses

The design possibilities for flowers on the golf course are endless, but here are a few ideas based on the above guidelines. Unless otherwise stated, these are full-sun plants.

- * Use **Astilbe x arendsii** as a ground-cover in a shady place. Several red, pink and white cultivars are available, flowering for 3-4 weeks in July and August. Astilbe is very hardy, requires no maintenance except for cutting back in fall or spring, and cutting off old flowers after flowering. The foliage remains an excellent coppery green the whole season. Astilbe is generally a pest-free, very hardy perennial. It reaches 2-3' in height.
- * Incorporate **Sedum spectabile** 'Meteor' or 'Autumn Joy' into shrub borders. The pink-red flowers are effective for over a month from late summer to early fall, and can be left on the plants to add texture to the winter landscape. The apple-green succulent leaves are very high quality for the whole season. This perennial is virtually pest-free. Both cultivars reach a height of 24-30'.
- * Use an ornamental grass like **Miscanthus sinensis** 'Gracillimus' in shrub borders or along a fence. The 5-foot tall plumes of this perennial clump-grass are very effective in September-October, turning gold

late in the season. The plumes create winter interest when left on the plants.

- * Use **Iris sibirica** 'Caesar's Brother' as a background for an annual flower bed. This dark blue Siberian iris is an excellent spring perennial, staying in flower for 2-3 weeks. Cut back flowers in early summer. The foliage clumps, 2-3' tall, are excellent throughout the season.
- * **Paeonia lactiflora** and **Paeonia tenuifolia** are beautiful peonies. The first, **P. lactiflora**, is the traditional peony. It is effective as a single specimen, and can easily take the place of a shrub. Select single-flowered peonies, which do not require staking and do not flop over in a spring rain storm. It reaches 36-42" height, is available in reds, pinks and white. **P. tenuifolia** is the "Fern-leaf Peony," a much finer textured perennial than the other. It is available only in red. The 24" Fern-leaf Peony dies back by mid-summer; place it in the foreground of a shrub border for

spectacular spring color, allow it to die back naturally.

- * **Rudbeckia** 'Goldsturm,' **Achillea** 'Coronation Gold' and **Anemone hupehensis japonica** are outstanding perennials, useful on the golf course as single specimen plants in shrub borders. 'Goldsturm' flowers for 6-8 weeks in late summer. It is a 36-48" tall, clump-forming, somewhat spreading yellow coneflower. 'Coronation Gold' is 36" tall, bright golden yellow, and very prolific in flowering. The gray-green fern-like leaves of this Yarrow form a 15" clump, and the flowers are held high above. It is very heat- and drought-tolerant. The Japanese Anemone forms a dark green, 24" mound, and flowers in late summer. The delicate-looking lavender, pink or white flowers are held above the leaves. It does best in semi-shaded areas, and is also very effective when planted in mass.
- * **Hemerocallis**, or Daylilies, are highly adaptable, low-maintenance

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perennials. Colors range from palest yellow through gold and orange to near-red, with many bicolors; flowers may be single or double; individual cultivars flower over several weeks between late June and late August; height varies from 1-4'. Daylilies are excellent for erosion control on banks, and are often used as a large-scale groundcover. This is truly a multi-purpose perennial, equally effective in a naturalized garden or as a specimen clump.

* **Hosta** is a large genus of perennials with great variety, ranging in size from less than 1' to over 3' height and greater spread. Leaf color ranges from pale yellow-green to distinctive blue-green, many cultivars having variegated color. Flowers, generally held above the foliage, are white, lavender or blue, and often fragrant, flowering over a 2-3 week period from mid- to late-summer. This shade-requiring perennial is useful for many purposes due to its diversity of form. Larger types are useful as specimens, and mid-size types as groundcovers.

* Bulbs belong in every landscape. They brighten up a bare bed used later for annuals and add color to an evergreen planting. Remember these pointers when planning for bulbs.

* Daffodils are best planted in large irregular patches in light shade, where they can naturalize into a permanent planting.

* When planning a bed of daffodils and tulips, use "single early tulips," which flower at the same time as daffodils.

* Leave bulb foliage undisturbed for six weeks after flowering before cutting back, to allow for replenishment of the bulb.

* Planting in clumps or broad swaths is more effective than planting in straight lines.

* Tulips are excellent when interplanted among daylilies. The tulips give early-season color, and their dying foliage is covered by the daylilies.

* Annuals are generally planted in beds or borders where they can supply a splash of color. However, they are also effective when planted in smaller numbers among trees and shrubs. Try planting a few individual plants of impatiens in a shrub border. You will be quite surprised at how large a 'Blitz' or 'Novette' impatiens can grow in one

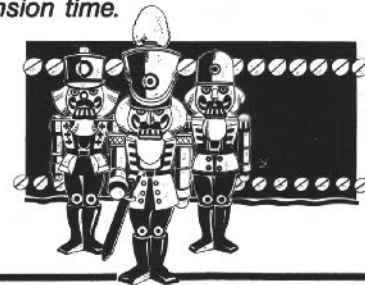
season! For a very low-maintenance small edging plant around a flower bed or shrub border, try **Sanvitalia procumbens**, the Creeping Zinnia. It is 6" tall and very spreading, with masses of small daisy-like yellow flowers. An orange-flowered cultivar, 'Mandarin Orange,' is among the 1987 All-America Selections. Creeping Zinnia has no insect or disease problems, and the plants bloom until frost, despite heat and drought. Another annual to try in small clumps is **Salvia farinacea** 'Victoria.' This cultivar of the Mealycup Sage has a high flower-to-foliage ratio, giving maximum blue color and excellent quality foliage. Sometimes old ideas are best; **Canna x generalis** is still one of the best large annuals. Older cultivars grow to 5' in height and are hard to use in the landscape, but newer types are only 24" tall, with less coarse foliage. Try a few

among shrubs.

Two last suggestions: break any rule you don't like, and be creative. Some of the best flower combinations happen through experimentation. Try a few new flowers each year, and keep notes for future reference.

Editor's Note:

Dr. Berg has recently moved to Maine, where she is an assistant professor in the Plant and Soil Sciences Department at the University of Maine at Orono. She will spend 40% of her time teaching classes in horticulture and floriculture. Her appointment also includes 60% extension time.



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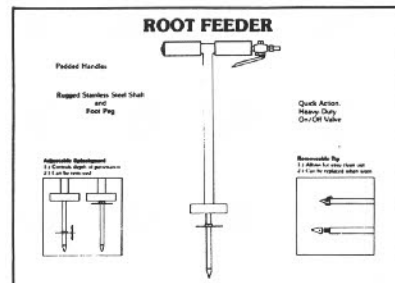
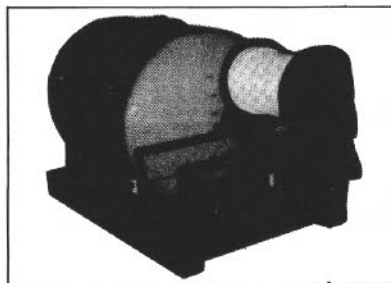
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