

THE NATURAL LOOK — SO OLD IT'S NEW

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Perhaps golfers in our state would be interested in knowing that it was a golf course superintendent from Illinois who helped initiate golf courses to the natural Scottish golf course look, including wild grasses and wildflowers. Some people still think it was the golf course architects Pete Dye and Jack Nicklaus who started the trend toward this Scottish look. Almost everybody now is taking credit and I think that's expected. Famous people always bring highlights to whatever they are doing. Their influence certainly has promoted what I helped start and brought to attention with a controversial speech about 15 years ago in New York at the August U.S.G.A. meeting entitled "Overgrooming is Overspending". Since that eventful presentation, I have

given the same speech more than a dozen times across the country and in Canada. GOLF DIGEST published my story and the prestigious industry magazine, PUBLIC WORKS, gave me much credit for pioneering golf course perimeters into wild grass and flower meadows and allowing some areas to grow natural like St. Andrews and other old country courses.

In essence my presentation was simply that we superintendents should not overgroom the WHOLE golf course so meticulously. Yes, concentrate even more on greens, fairways and tee management, but don't carry out the ridiculous wall-to-wall manicuring and overgrooming to such a steep degree that we are pricing ourselves out of golf course business. Leave some golf land for wild animals, birds and flowers. Make the golf game more challenging and enjoyable, the way it was meant to be by the founders and architects of this wonderful game, and not this present-day look of synthetically manicured and expensive backyards clipped to an unnatural perfection.

Whenever I gave that overgrooming talk to
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my fellow superintendents and others, or wrote about it, or was quoted in articles and magazines, the reaction by some was that I had lost my marbles. Most of the others didn't take me seriously. Some even wrote strongly against my "natural look" concept. But then something happened. The high cost of maintaining country clubs drastically accelerated in the 70's and rose each year at a relentless pace and everything changed. Concern set in about the high cost of maintaining golf courses, and slowly my idea of wildflowers and the natural look suddenly didn't sound so looney because it saved money. Now the elite golf course architects were the first to begin shouting its virtues whenever they broke expensive land for a new golf course. Something else happened, also. People began to be deeply concerned about our ecology and environment. Scientists who had been warning us for years about old Mother Earth and the dangers facing it due to too much technology and poisonous emissions began to be closely heeded. A little old lady from Texas began planting wildflowers along our highways and roads. The natural look was now definitely in!

Today I am happy to say thousands of golf courses have set aside natural areas to prosper and spread. Many golf courses enhance these restful areas even more (like I have) with beautiful native flowers and grasses. And, of course, golf course architects continue to build courses with that "Scottish Look". Landscape firms and seed companies are making a bundle by providing the natural look to golf courses, parks, industries, schools, highways, verges and even homeowners. The natural look has taken over in our landscape and not just grown and forgotten in old graveyards and railroad rights of way. The great Walter Hagen whose poignant quote, "Be sure to stop and smell the flowers as you go by", makes it easier for all of us now to do so. I am glad I had a part in providing this opportunity.



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For additional information, contact James G. Prusa, Associate Executive Director, GCSAA Headquarters, 1617 St. Andrews Drive, Lawrence, KS 66046.