
University of Minnesota UPDATE

Russian Sage Provides Beauty From Mid-Summer Until Frost

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There's a definite role for flowering perennials in the golf course landscape. They can add distinctive color and beauty that changes over the growing season. And unlike flowering annuals, they'll come up every year — barring a weather catastrophe. Provided you choose your perennials knowledgeably, you can enjoy blooms most of the summer.

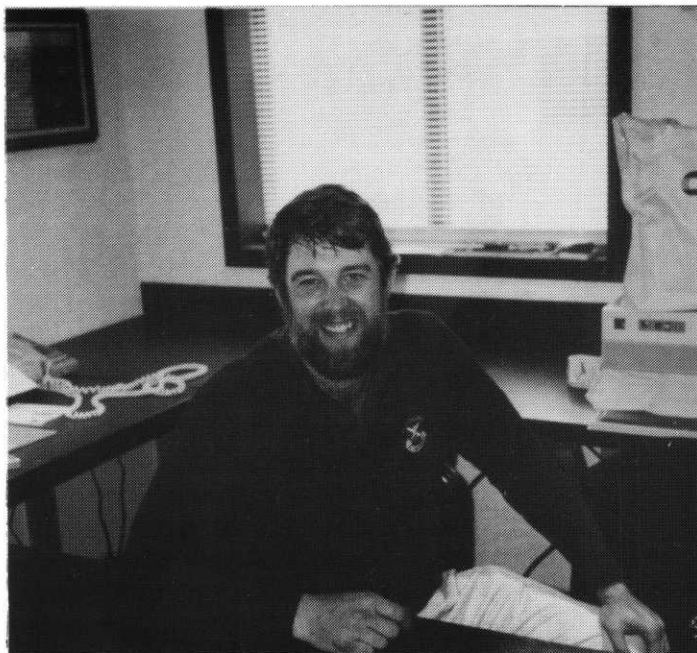
Consider planting Russian Sage, *Perovskia Atriplicifolia*. It was recently chosen "Perennial Plant of the Year" for 1995 by the Perennial Plant Association, a distinction it richly deserves. Not only is Russian Sage a strikingly handsome plant, it's virtually pest-free and very easy to grow.

Winter-hardy throughout the Upper Midwest (to USDA hardiness zone 3 with a little extra protection), this semi-woody plant grows three to four feet tall over the course of the summer. After a year or two in the landscape, it will resemble an airy shrub rather than a flowering perennial. A hedge-like row of plants would be particularly striking. So would a large mass planting.

Russian Sage has coarsely toothed silvery, grey-green foliage. Beginning in mid-summer, it develops large spikes of delicate lavender blue flowers that create the illusion of hazy purple clouds from a distance. These flower spikes continue to expand until weather turns cold and frosty in autumn.

Plant Russian Sage in full sunlight, where soil drains readily. It is drought-tolerant, and will thrive under hot, dry conditions that would cause most other flowers to wilt and decline without constant irrigation. In fall, after it's been damaged by cold, prune stems back to 4 to 6 inches. Mulch the plants with leaves or straw to reduce damage from freeze/thaw cycles in late winter and early spring.

Russian Sage will add a lot to the aesthetic appeal of a golf course (or any other large-scale landscape) without creating the need for lots of additional labor. You can plant containerized specimens of these and other flowering perennials throughout the growing season.



Tom Parent, Superintendent, River Oaks, smiles through the rain.

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