

TREES ON THE GOLF COURSE AS SEEN BY A GOLFER

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When most golfers think of their ideal golf course, they think of lush green fairways leading to immaculately manicured greens surrounded by sand traps filled with clean, white sand. And some will think of or remember the water that came into play on certain holes. But there is another feature on most golf courses that adds immeasurably to the play of the game and to the beauty of the course; that feature is trees. Think how barren, uninteresting, and for most courses how unchallenging, they would be without trees.

Let's take a look at trees on the golf course, not as seen by a botanist or as a horticulturist, but as seen by a golfer; what do they mean to him? Basically, they have four meanings: hazards, markers, shade and beauty.

Trees are often a significant hazard to a golfer in the play of the game. Woods on either side of the hole, from tee to the green, channelize play to a relatively narrow area. To deviate from the fairway, with a slice or a hook, would cause some serious problems. Thus, one of the primary ways that trees are used on the golf course is to channelize play to specific areas. Trees can be obstructions in the line of flight. The player must decide: is it better to go over, under, or around the tree?

Depending on the size, spread, fullness, and placement of the tree or trees in relationship to the line of flight, the golfer must determine if he has the skill to execute a shot that will place him onto the green or well forward on the fairway or must he sacrifice a stroke by going around rather than over the tree?

Trees, particularly large groups such as woods, can have a strong influence on wind, which in turn can affect the flight of the golf ball. A player hitting a shot from a site protected from the wind, by trees, must keep in mind that the ball's flight will be affected as it passes out of the wooded area; thus he must allow accordingly for the wind. Hitting into a "protected" green is also a challenge in that the wind will be moderated as the ball passes into the zone protected by the trees.

Trees, and shrubs too, can sometimes cause a golfer to lose strokes due to an unplayable lie. The ball may come to rest beneath the spreading branches of a hawthorn, and who wants to suffer the indignity of playing such a shot? Or the ball may come to rest in the branches of an evergreen, in a branch crotch, or at the base of the tree trunk nestled in among some large buttress roots. In any case, the shot is most likely unplayable and the player must lose a stroke and take the drop.

The second way that a golfer looks at trees is as marker objects to give him a sense of distance, direction, and limitation. Good golfers like to know the distance to the pin. Average golfers settle for the distance to the green. Nevertheless trees can be used as reference points for estimating distance to the pin or green. Golfers that play a course regularly develop either a feeling for the distance from certain locations on each hole or they pace off the distances. Some clubs provide 'distance cards' listing the yardage from selected spots; i.e., large oak, right of fairway, 150 yards.

On holes where the golfer is hitting to a blind green (a green out of view of the golfer) he will often select a target tree to hit toward or over, as the situation presents itself.

Trees also serve to mark boundaries of individual holes and in some cases as out-of-bounds markers.

A third use that golfers make of trees is for shelter, particularly shelter from the sun in summer. Sometimes golfers will seek the shelter of a tree from a sudden storm. However, this is not desirable during a lightning storm. In such a situation trees should be avoided since they do attract lightning. Golfers are better off to seek the shelter of a building or stay in the open and get wet. A wet golfer is a lot better than a dead one.

The final but not the least significant way that golfers look at trees is as things of beauty and enjoyment. The reason that most people play golf is for relaxation; to get away from their work and enjoy three or four hours in the fresh air, walking on grass, communing with nature while playing a game that is both challenging and socially regarding. Although most golfers don't even realize it, and some would not admit it, trees on the golf course--although frustrating at times--are pleasing psychological modifiers. Many of the great golf courses are remembered not so much for their degree of difficulty but rather for the beauty of their landscape. What golfer is not impressed and delighted with the beauty of the display of flowering trees and shrubs in the spring or the array of color in the fall, especially in the northern parts of the country? Also, many a golfer has enjoyed the fruits of trees on the course, whether it was an apple eaten for its food value or a hawthorn that was viewed for its magnificent display of bright red fruit in the fall.

Trees are an important part of the golf course. They not only modify the play of the game but they modify the player.

Trees for the golf course should be selected, sited, planted, and maintained with this thought in mind. In most cases it makes little difference what species of tree is used to produce an obstacle to play or to make a marker for a boundary. A maple, an oak or a crab apple will each do the job. But for the sake of beauty and the enjoyment of the golfer, a variety of tree species should be planted; species that are hardy to the site, free of insects and disease problems. When possible, it is desirable to use a mixture of both evergreens and deciduous species, large and small trees, flowering and non-flowering types. On some courses it is good practice to take advantage of native plants that have showy flowers, such as the dogwood, red bud and flowering crabapple. And in other situations it may be a native shrub such as the azalea in the southern states or the gorse that is used so effectively in Scotland.

The quality of the grass is of major importance to any golfer but the diversity and quality of the trees is also important.

Plant trees to modify the play of the game.

Plant trees to modify the golfer.