

Plan for tree failure and variety

Even the mightiest oak's days are numbered. To best benefit from a tree's 25- to 50-year lifespan, plant diverse species and reduce tree/turf conflicts.

Superintendents are happy when trees grow free of problems. When problems arise—like safety problems and disease problems—they tend to feel otherwise.

Careful planting, realistic assessment of tree longevity and attention to tree needs that matches the concern you have for turf will eliminate these problems, says Dr. Jim Clark, an arborist with HortScience, Inc., of San Francisco.

For starters, get it out of your head that a tree will live "forever." Realistically, says Clark, tree life is measured between 25 and 100 years.

"Trees are planted, they take up space and then they die," says Clark, who tells superintendents and landscape managers to plan for tree decline, failure, maintenance and safety over the course of the tree's life.

Age & species diversity

The best stands of trees contain an assortment of young and old trees growing at the same time. When all the trees along a fairway or corporate business park are the same age and species, at some point they're going to decline rapidly or get hit with a common disease...all at once.

When the giants come down, in a golf course scenario, says Clark, "Unless we have a new population of trees growing to replace older ones, the potential is great for changing the look and playability of the course."

Clark often encounters a reluctance among course members to remove any tree, be it alive or dead, and says it's much easier to overcome that reluctance if you can have a younger tree next to it to take its place.

Another aspect of species diversity: if

▶ *Jim Clark:
Trees respond
more slowly to
irrigation than
does turf.*



Jim Clark's tips for success with trees:

- 1) Plan for age and species diversity.
- 2) Manage a stand of trees carefully over time.
- 3) Scout for potential safety problems.
- 4) Reduce the number of tree/turf conflicts, such as nutrient competition and shade problems around greens.

some problem develops within that species, we're in tough shape if that species is dominant in our working area.

The Monterey pine beetle and pine pitch canker were recent infestations that wiped out many Monterey pines in the San Francisco Bay area. That's an extreme ex-

ample, but it can happen.

"Whether it's Dutch elm disease or oak wilt or pine bark beetles," says Clark, "our reliance on a single species leaves us open to a large-scale infestation and potential for losing lots of trees. If we're on a site that is dependent only on this species, as those two pests become more problematic we're going to run into trouble fairly rapidly."

Public safety

Clark suggests it's better to discuss tree maintenance before an accident happens than to discuss it with an attorney after an accident. Be realistic when assessing a tree's condition and potential for falling. Even though a certain tree might be a significant component to the hole's play, if there was a tree failure, what's the likelihood that there would be a "target" standing beneath the falling branches?

Safety evaluations may be only rough estimates of "what might happen some day," but Clark insists that those evaluations be conducted. Plan for the worst.

Clark says that "hangers"—those loose branches that fall from trees—cause the most accidents.

"Look up," says Clark, "and train yourself and crews to spot the hangers."

Tree care

Pruning is related to both safety and the life of the tree. Incorrect pruning can turn a tree into a wind-sensitive hazard, or kill it.

Topping—that is, cutting main branches back to stubs—is the most often committed pruning offense.

Secondly, *thin* the tree canopy, don't raise it. Prune, for example, along every third branch.

Consult a professional arborist with questions. If you don't have a well-trained tree expert on staff, don't do it yourself. Let the arborist do the job. **LM**