



Nobody uses the left side of this tee because of tree limb interference.

Ten Timely Tips to Avoid Tree Troubles

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CONSIDERING THE positive impact of green vegetation on our urban environment, it is only natural that people want to plant more trees on golf courses. In short, trees exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen via photosynthesis, and in the summer offer welcome relief from the hot sun. But before scheduling that next tree fund golf tournament, remember that too many trees can block good air circulation and sunlight exposure to vital areas of the course, such as near greens and tees. Furthermore, when not properly located, their presence can impose severe and unwarranted penalties on golfers in pursuit of the club championship or just out for a friendly match.

There are a few simple guidelines for adding trees to golf courses without

creating unwanted side effects. Adhering to the following ten tips will help ensure that a new tree becomes a long-term asset to the club, and not a long-term maintenance nightmare.

Before reviewing these guidelines, realize that any one may not apply in all situations. For example, a large tree located 75 feet away from a green on the south side will cause more severe shade problems than a same-sized tree located an equal distance on the north side.

Tip Number 1. Make sure to locate a tree where its mature canopy will not protrude on the line-of-flight between a tee and fairway. Interfering limbs cause players to use only a fraction of the available teeing space, making an otherwise adequately sized tee show signs of needing enlargement.

For example, a tree planted too close to the front right side of a tee will cause wear problems on the left side.

Tip Number 2. To allow for good air movement and exposure to sunlight, resist the temptation to plant dense groves of trees around greens, tees, and fairways. Poor air circulation, especially in areas where greens are located, increases temperature and humidity, inhibits surface and soil drying, and promotes disease development. Furthermore, dense shade during the winter can prolong snow and ice cover on greens in the North, and render greens in the South and Pacific Northwest helpless against foot traffic as cooler temperatures retard active growth and inhibit drying.

In locations where these problems exist, heavy pruning is usually required,

(Below) Competition between tree roots and low-cut turfgrass can lead to serious problems. Black locust roots invading a tee.

(Right) Heavy shade during the winter months can reduce a green's ability to recover from foot traffic.



and tree removal is often necessary. Given that these two measures are unpopular and costly, the best advice is to plant new trees in such a way as to avoid sunlight penetration and air circulation problems.

Tip Number 3. Avoid the temptation of filling every bit of rough between adjacent fairways with trees, even if it would be done for the sake of safety. No matter how many trees are planted to protect players in neighboring fairways, it is inevitable that golfers will find a way through. Once they do, LOOK OUT!

All of a sudden the stray golfer is faced with aiming right over the heads of oncoming players in the next fairway, hoping to hit a high fade back over the trees. FORE!

If the intent of new plantings is to protect golfers in an adjacent fairway, then groupings of trees should be planted in strategic areas near the tee. This should prevent errant shots from having a chance to stray. Also, leave several openings between the neighboring fairways near the landing area; if golfers do stray, they will have a reasonable opportunity to return to their own fairway.

Tip Number 4. Never plant potentially large trees closer than 75 feet from a green or tee. In addition to shading the turf, their root systems can be serious competitors with important turf areas for water and nutrients. Many people are under the mistaken impression that tree roots do not extend beyond the drip line of the tree canopy. A more realistic view is that tree roots extend outward from the trunk approximately one to one-and-a-half times the height of the tree.

For example, if a tree is 100 feet tall, its roots can extend outward from the trunk as far as 100-150 feet or more. Once tree roots establish themselves beneath a green or tee, they rob the turf of water and nutrients. In situations where tree roots are a problem, they can be severed with a trencher, and a barrier can be installed in the trench to discourage reestablishment.

Tip Number 5. Flowering trees add unmistakable beauty to any course. Many types of flowering trees have tender bark and a low branching crown, however, and are very susceptible to mower damage. This sensitivity makes many of them poor candidates for use on golf courses unless they are carefully protected.

Consider Augusta National Golf Club as an example. The beautiful flowering dogwoods and azaleas have been planted in protected areas around large pine trees where there is rarely an occasion to operate heavy mowing equipment.

Tip Number 6. Avoid screening out scenic vistas, such as ocean or mountain views, stately clubhouses, and other beautiful scenes. A vista that has been blocked by trees is usually forgotten and may be lost forever.

Tip Number 7. Trees or shrubs are usually poor choices as yardage indicators. When one of the plantings is damaged or dies, it is usually difficult to replace with one of identical appearance and size.

An alternative means of indicating yardage is to mark large, landmark trees already present throughout the course with small wooden or metal plaques. These trees can then be indicated on the reverse side of the scorecard. The advantage of using landmark trees is that they appear naturally in the course surroundings, and because of their great size, they can be seen easily by golfers who stray into deep rough.

Tip Number 8. When selecting trees, choose species that match the sur-

rounding vegetation theme and have favorable characteristics. Fast-growing trees and trees with large fruit are usually not good candidates for golf courses because they often have invasive surface root systems or require frequent cleanup.

Also, try to limit the selection of different species to a reasonable number. A continuous vegetation theme is often the trademark of many of America's highest-ranked courses. For example, Medinah Country Club, the site of the 1990 U.S. Open, is noted for its oak trees throughout the property.

Tip Number 9. Try to naturalize the appearance of large tree plantings by

randomizing the distance between each tree. A good way to do this is to hit several dozen golf balls into a rough area from a distance of about 200 yards. At the landing site of each golf ball place a small flag, and then selectively remove one flag at a time until there is an appropriate number left. Be sure to leave enough space between trees to accommodate your mowing equipment.

Tip Number 10. Never plant more than the maintenance staff can adequately maintain. During the first year of establishment, small trees require extra attention and regular hand-watering during the summer. If trees must be purchased in large numbers, it

is best to establish a nursery near the maintenance facility where they can be properly cared for. Then, over the next several years, gradually transplant them throughout the course.

In developing a tree planting plan for a golf course, it is important to recognize that what makes your course different from a park or your own front yard is the importance of the quality of the turf in relation to the playing of the game of golf. Trees can play many useful roles on golf courses, but when overplanted and misused they can cause turf maintenance problems and detract from the appearance and playability of the course. Don't let trees overwhelm your golf course.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

WHAT'S YOUR BATTING AVERAGE? *An Opinion on Unreasonable Expectations*

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GOLFERS are well known for making comparisons. They seem to take pride in telling anyone who will listen how a course down the road does something this way or that. They compare budgets, acreage maintained, soils, grass types, green speed, the amount of labor, and many other facts. Sometimes the comparisons are accurate, sometimes not.

Let's take this comparison one step further. It's not really valid, but it is interesting nonetheless.

Baseball: A .250 batting average is just that — an average. A ball player hits safely one at-bat in four. A "star" bats .300, and an immortal like Ted Williams bats .400. If you are keeping score, and you should be, that's four out of ten.

Basketball: Superstars shoot just over 50% from the field. They shoot a ball into a hoop at a distance of zero (a dunk) to 18-22 feet or more.

Golf: A par round of golf is normally about 72. Golfers who consistently shoot less than par are found on the PGA Tour, making lots of money.

Golfers who shoot consistently over par are found everywhere, and includes those people making the comparisons. The average handicap in the country is just over 18. The average golfer, therefore, shoots about 25% over par.

At what percentage do golf course superintendents produce quality turf-grass? As a basis for comparison, golf courses contain about 30 acres of fairways, 2.5 acres of greens, and 2.5 acres of tees. This equates to about 100,000 sq. ft. of greens and tees and 1,320,000 sq. ft. of fairways. Thus, if a superintendent "bats" .400, which would put him in great company in baseball, it means your superstar would lose the equivalent of 10.8 greens and tees out of 18. On fairways, he would lose about 18 acres of turf.

While this .400 batting average might get you into the Baseball Hall of Fame, you would probably lose your job as a golf course superintendent.

All of this may sound ludicrous, but the fact remains that golfers have set such high standards for their golf courses that maintaining these standards is difficult, expensive, and some-

times impossible to achieve. To keep alive every blade of grass on every green, tee, and fairway regardless of the conditions, and not being willing to accept anything less, is wishful thinking and a mistake.

Everything cannot be perfect on every golf course every day. Even if it were possible, what would it cost?

So, look at your golf course. My message to course officials reading this opinion is not to be so concerned if the golf course superintendent bats only .998. After all, this equates to losing about 200 sq. ft. of turf, a 10 ft. by 20 ft. area of greens or tees and 2,640 sq. ft. of fairways, or .06 of an acre.

Anyone who bats this percentage or better deserves a pat on the back, not a kick in the pants. After all, what other industry which deals so closely with Mother Nature can boast a 99% average or better? Not many.

Therefore, the next time you read about a professional athlete making \$2,000,000 a year to achieve only a 30% batting average, be proud . . . because golf course superintendents are batting 99%, or better.