

Landscaping a Golf Course

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In the building of a country club, the cost of erecting buildings and constructing fairways, greens and tees as a rule far exceeds available funds. Hence little or nothing is budgeted for landscaping.

To beautify a fine residence with spacious grounds, architects budget from 15 to 20 per cent of the cost of the building. Since club houses are usually pretentious structures, budgetary limitations invariably limit such expenditures to the immediate club house grounds.

Landscaping of the golf holes, therefore, becomes a longed-for but seldom-realized desire, and many of the fine old courses on this continent are lacking in natural beauty.

Cost Can Be Low

When a golfer steps onto a tee to drive, he takes a long look down the fairway. A swamp, ravine or creek arouses a sense of caution and tension. A beautiful tree or a collection of them properly placed excites admiration. The reaction is likely to be relaxation and appreciation.

Beautiful fairways on inland courses are essentially avenues bordered by beautiful trees. The golfer's drive envisages a distance of 200 yards or more. Objects such as flower beds and shrubs are too small to have significance. They even may be distracting. Trees, larger, the more graceful, the supreme plant in nature, catch the eye. Bunkers bordering a fairway are ugly scars on carpet of green.

The distressing picture described above confronted the Oak Hill Country Club twenty-six years ago. We had a beautiful Tudor Gothic club house in the middle of 350 acres of abandoned, weed-infested farm land. Here and there were a few fence-line trees. Light, sandy top soil blew away with every passing breeze. Clay

was about as pervious as a concrete pavement. The growth of grass presented an exceedingly difficult problem. To add to the desolation, there was a staggering debt.

Yet, in spite of these handicaps, Oak Hill has developed unsurpassed fairways, and the landscaping on its two eighteen-hole courses has given it world-wide distinction. To achieve this has required twenty-six years of time but little capital expense to the club.

The landscaping program usually begins around the tees, later around the greens and lastly along the fairways. Each of these areas calls for special consideration.

At the outset every club should establish a tree nursery for which one or two acres of well-drained, good soil is required. About three fourths of this should be stocked with seedling evergreens and hard woods, which may be purchased at low cost from tree growing nurseries or from the State. Another portion should be set aside for the planting of tree seeds, such as oaks, hard maples, beech and ash. These can be gathered each fall from specimen trees in local parks.

Another of the first and most important steps is to form a liaison with a nearby state agricultural school, a university forestry school, or a state conservation commission—all three, if possible. Their advice and assistance will be found most helpful. Oak Hill has been extremely benefited in this way. Trees which may be useful and ornamental in residence landscaping may be valueless or detrimental on a golf course.

About the Tees

The planting about a tee should be attractive, restful and protective against the

elements. One or two deciduous trees, so located as to afford shade on the tee in hot midsummer, is desirable. Before purchases are made, one should be thoroughly familiar with the thermal zones of the United States. These are broad bands 200 miles, more or less, in width and extending irregularly across the country; the minimum range of cold is approximately the same throughout the thermal zone. Good nursery stock is usually listed in relation to the thermal zone in which it will thrive best. Native material, of course, meets this condition. Therefore, in the selection of evergreens, those indigenous to the locality will prove ultimately to be the most satisfactory. In the northeastern United States, the spruces, particularly the white, are attractive, as is the native hemlock and the European larch. Native red and white pines grow luxuriantly. Foreign evergreens, such as the western spruces and pines and the European conifers, should be used sparingly. They are shorter lived and more prone to disease. They look well for twenty to thirty years, then tend to disintegrate. Oaks, red, white and pin, are the trees of choice for planting around both tees and greens because they retain their leaves in the fall long after the close of the golf season.

As a beginning, six evergreens, three to four feet in height, and two oak saplings, five to six feet in height, may be purchased for \$2 or \$3 each, a total of not more than \$25. With proper care, such as watering and mulching, evergreens will grow from two to four feet and oaks from twelve to eighteen inches or more a year, so that in ten years this base planting will present sizeable proportions. An oak thirty years from the acorn stage will develop into a twenty-five to thirty foot tree. Oaks, contrary to the common notion, grow quite as rapidly as elms. Elms, soft maples, poplars and walnut trees have no place near the playing areas of a golf course. They are too fragile and their early falling twig, fruit and foliage habits present a

labor problem and are an interminable nuisance to golfers.

Around the Greens

The landscaping of greens differs from that of the tees. The golfer reaches the green, as a rule, after a comparatively long shot. Bunkers afford adequate penalties for misplays as well as opportunities for the exercise of golfing skill. Evergreens planted about a green are unfair hazards, particularly if they are allowed to grow naturally with the lower whorls touching the ground. An evergreen with its lower branches cut off is a monstrosity. The trees about a green should be oaks, pin, red or white. By using these, the leaf and twig problem in the fall is avoided. Hard maples may be used at a slightly greater distance from the green, but elms, soft maples and flowering fruit trees should be shunned.

A fair-sized green should have about four trees at such distance from its boundaries as to avoid excessive shade and protruding root growth. Young, deciduous trees should be protected against mower injury by stakes or other trunk guards.

Along Fairways

One of the greatest mistakes would be to attempt to adapt an old apple orchard to golf-course landscaping. Old apple trees are a perpetual nuisance, a constant source of insect infestations. They present a maintenance effort, and expense, throughout the golfing season that could better be devoted to more useful trees.

Plantings along fairways may consist of clumps, or plantations, of evergreens or deciduous trees, but they should be so located as to avoid both undue golfing hazards and the fall leaf problem. Trees bordering the fairway should preferably be oaks. Willows have their special place along creeks and on the banks of ponds, and for this the Wisconsin willow is advised. Birches, beeches and mountain ash, too, have their place in selected locations. A golf hole lined with mountain ash,



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This beautiful avenue of beautiful trees is the seventeenth hole on the West course at the Oak Hill Country Club. It is a par 3 and measures 158 yards.

backed by hemlocks or white spruce, presents a gorgeous sight in the fall.

An eighteen-hole golf course of upwards of eighty-five acres requires for its base planting about 2,000 young trees. Large expanses of unused rough serve excellently as tree plantations which ultimately may become small, park-like areas. The perimeter of a golf course is best forested with evergreens; white spruce, red pine and hemlock are ideal. The trees should be staggered roughly twenty to thirty feet apart. A multiflora rose hedge, planted about three feet from the property line, makes a beautiful, inexpensive and impenetrable fence serving to keep out trespassers, dogs and cats. At the same time it provides a shelter and a source of winter food for game birds and small animals.

Evergreens not only serve to screen out adjoining residential districts but they are invaluable as insulators of noise and as windbreaks. It is not generally appreciated that long open fairways serve as excellent beds for surface

air currents or wind rivers. They tend both to dry the turf and to cause wind erosion. This is particularly true on hilly and sandy courses, and for a few years it was a problem at Oak Hill. The remedy is skillful planting of evergreens.

The Nursery

Thus far, only preliminary, or basic, landscaping has been discussed. The cost of the material should not be more than \$5,000 and could be much less if a large part of it were seedling stock. If possible, the seedling stock should be purchased the first year, installed in the nursery and planted in permanent locations as conditions permit. This can be done by the grounds crew in the late fall and early spring, before fairways need major attention. With a limited labor force and funds, it may take five years or more to complete this base planting. Meanwhile, the young stock in the nursery is growing and uniformity in size is maintained. Each year thereafter seedling or sapling stock of rare or specimen trees

should be purchased and installed in the nursery. These can be secured in lots of ten, twenty-five or one hundred at low cost. European larches, the various western blue spruces, the gum trees, tulip, Kentucky coffee, Chinese scholar, Russian olive, the gingko, rare oaks, the dogwoods and flowering crabs are recommended. With the nursery thus stocked, the landscaper can look forward to many years of progressive beautification at little further cost for materials.

When buying nursery stock, do not rely solely upon nursery catalogue pictures. Visit a good park or arboretum and see a full-grown, mature specimen. Wonderful color effects can be produced in the fall by various combinations of trees with colored foliage. This is especially true where hillsides are available for mass grouping. One of the wisest steps a landscaping committee could take would be to visit some of the well-known arboreta and parks, such as the Arnold Arboretum, in Boston, and the Highland or Durand-Eastman Parks in Rochester. The latter, with a hilly terrain, has a public golf course and some of the most beautiful landscaping effects in the world. A visit to the Oak Hill Country Club would reveal what can be achieved at little expense to the club.

Financing

The question may arise: How does a club with a staggering overhead and debt finance such a program?

The first requisite is a chairman with missionary zeal and a love of nature. Previous knowledge or training is not necessary. That can readily be acquired and is a richly rewarding experience.

Next, there should be a small committee of enthusiastic backers. By various persuasive methods, members of the club should be approached to supply the material for a given project. It can be pointed out, for example, that for as little as \$20 the basic planting of a tee or green could be begun.

A project which received vigorous support at Oak Hill was the naming of trees

honoring members for distinguished service to the Club and those who had lost their lives in the service of our country. Many trees now honor members who have loyally supported the club for fifteen years or more. Indeed this is a prized feature.

Special trees have been reserved for persons who have rendered distinguished service to golf. One beautiful pin oak honors Francis Ouimet. Another honors Charles Coe, who won the Amateur Championship at Oak Hill in 1949. The members of the British Walker Cup Team who played in that Championship were so impressed with the dignity of the ceremony honoring Coe that they expressed the wish that their visit might be similarly commemorated. This was done later in the year in an impressive ceremony to which the then British Ambassador, Sir Oliver Franks, sent a representative.

In all, there are now 250 memorial trees. A simple, inexpensive tablet of masonite bearing the name of the tree and the person honored is attached. The recipient or his friends may replace this with a suitable bronze plaque.

The sentimental, esthetic and financial value of the memorial trees to Oak Hill cannot be overestimated. It has promoted a lively interest in the natural beauty of the club because each person honored feels that he is an integral part of the landscaping. This activity has proved a fruitful source of income to our landscaping budget. Donations of \$50 to \$100 are not uncommon.

Nothing a club can do will contribute more to its security and permanence than beautifully landscaped grounds. It has been estimated that it has added more than a million dollars to the value of Oak Hill property. Furthermore, because of it, the building developments which are gradually surrounding the club have already increased the taxable values of these properties by at least a million and a half dollars. A fine country club is a real community asset and stimulus to suburban growth.