



The remains of a Monterey cypress tree create a striking silhouette and enframe the clubhouse from the 17th fairway at the Cypress Point Club, California.

A Guide to Using Trees On the Golf Course

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THE ROLE OF turfgrass on golf courses clearly is to provide a playing surface for the game itself and a beautiful base for the aesthetic appeal of the course. Beauty and function are also characteristic of the roles played by trees on golf courses. With but a few exceptions, trees are a vital part of the landscape on most courses in the United States. On many courses, they are the third dimension in landscape, just as walls in a room. Trees create a feeling of privacy and provide continuity from one part of the course to the next.

Trees, too, are unique features of courses because they change dramatically with time. Even though a club may try to maintain specific standards with respect to other factors of playability, such as green speed, fairway width, cutting height, etc., the trees will continue to grow and change. From the time they are planted until the time they are removed, trees will continually alter the appearance and playability of that golf course.

Considering the longevity of many species and their long-term effects on

the course, the importance of developing a long-range tree-planning, planting and maintenance program should be quite apparent. Unfortunately, too few clubs take their tree programs far enough to obtain the best results. A complete analysis should be made of the golf course and decisions made as to where the trees are needed. The tree species should be selected based on the conditions of the site and the function they are to serve. Finally, after they are planted, the trees should receive routine maintenance on an annual basis,

depending on their need. These three basic phases — deciding where to locate trees, selecting the appropriate species, and long-term care and maintenance — are all equally important to the success of the program. The remainder of this article will deal with the first phase, determining where trees should be placed on the golf course.

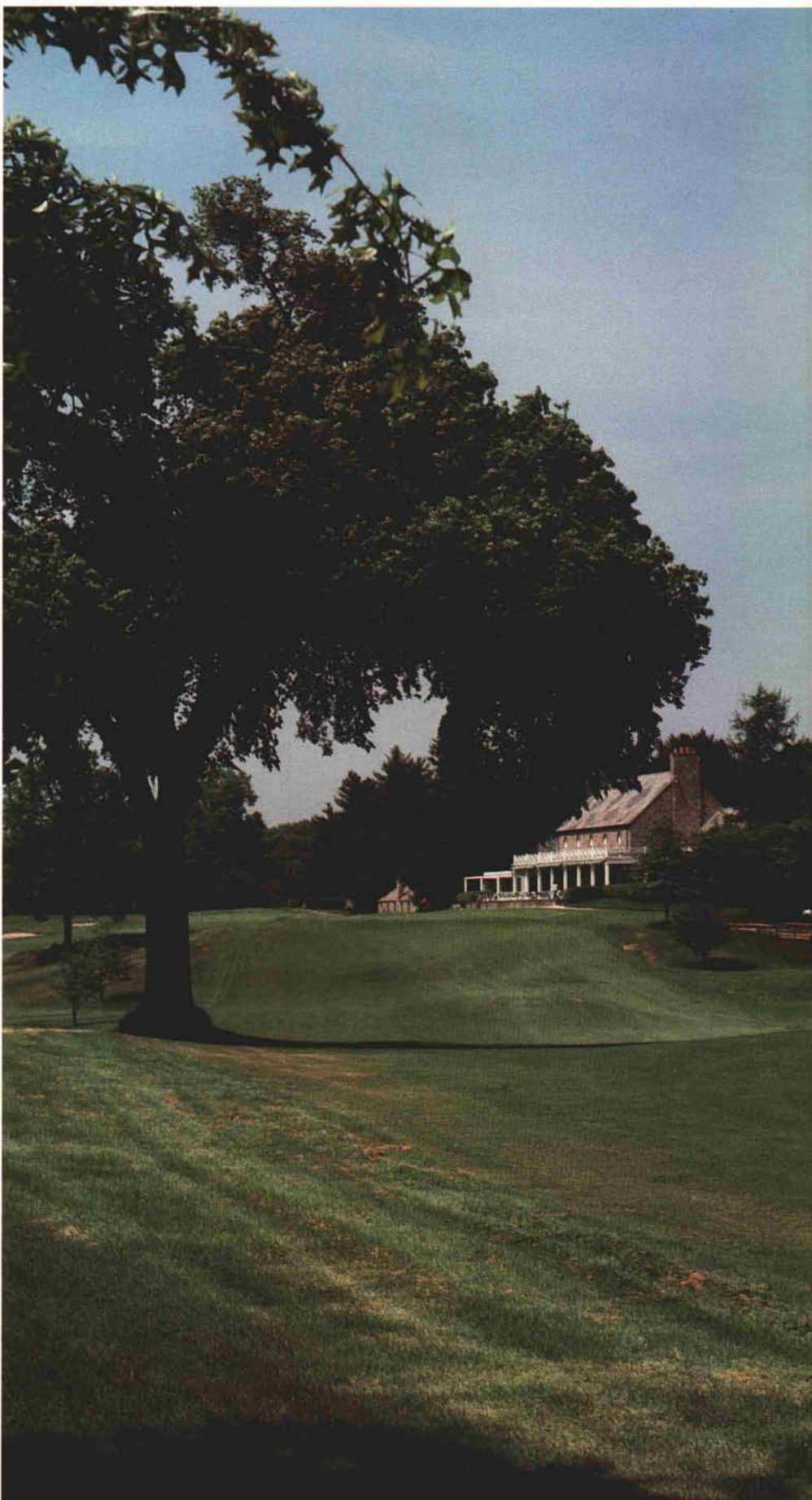
As with any important project, it is advisable to seek the advice of experts when developing a tree-planting program. This is particularly critical considering the long-term effects of trees on the course and the cost of their initial installation and subsequent maintenance. Any experienced golf course superintendent will tell you that removing any living trees will take an Act of Congress if the golfers have anything to say about it. That's why it is so important to do the job correctly from the beginning. Good results can best be ensured by consulting with a golf course architect or a landscape architect with experience in golf course planting. They are educated in the principles of good landscaping design, and they can bring out the best the course layout has to offer. The cost of their services is very small indeed when it is averaged over the lifetime of the plantings they recommend.

If a golf club can't afford to pay for landscaping services, it might do well to contact the state university. State colleges often have personnel who will offer sound advice in landscape design, and some may even send representatives to the course for on-site recommendations. Golf course superintendents at many clubs have done excellent landscape development work, especially those with training and experience. The GCSAA offers several seminars in landscape design recommended for superintendents interested in developing their talents in this area. Any superintendent who is about to embark on a tree-planting program would be well-advised to visit several of the great golf courses to see how trees are used. Following are a few guidelines to keep in mind as plans for placing trees on the course are developed.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES

To begin with, consider that a golf course is a massive landscape and that tree plantings must be kept in scale to obtain the proper effect. In other words, what may be an appropriate planting in someone's backyard would appear out of proportion on a 150-acre golf course.

The American elm (left) had a dominant effect, which was changed dramatically (right) when the tree had to be removed because of disease. The 18th hole at the Round Hill Club, Connecticut.





It may take dozens of trees to do what only a few can do on a small property. Consider also that trees should complement the course layout, not detract from it. As a golfer plays a hole, the trees should create a special atmosphere without distraction to the real object of his attention — the green. The trees may enframe the hole, protect a dogleg, direct play, screen surrounding areas or outline the green, but they should not draw attention to themselves. What this means is that most golf course plantings should be neutral in appearance. Normal or familiar trees, such as maples, oaks, pines, etc., should predominate in most areas. Trees like the spruce, Lombardy poplar, Sunburst honey locust, and Crimson King maple are examples of exclamation points in the landscape. They draw attention to themselves and should be used carefully and in moderation. Any tree with unusual color, shape, size or texture will fall into this category.

Golfers in metropolitan areas often say they enjoy the game because it gives them an opportunity for recreation in a natural environment — a country setting in the midst of the city. If this type of setting is to be preserved, then golf course tree plantings must reflect nature's hand in their composition. Avoid a straight-line effect at all costs. Even where space is limited, such as along a property border or between a green and the next tee, individual trees within a row can usually be offset somewhat so that a straight line can be prevented. In nature, groups or clumps of the same kind of trees may be found together in larger groups. On the golf course, group trees in uneven numbers and space the plants at unequal distances apart, increasing (but not regularly so) as the plants get further from the real center of the group. The best trees to use on golf courses are often the ones native to the area or species that appear to be native trees. This gives the golfer a feeling of continuity, as opposed to being bombarded by a number of strange-looking ornamental plants. Groups of trees with different shapes, sizes, colors or textures can be used in various parts of the course, but use only two or three different types within a single viewing area. Masses are much more effective than mixtures.

Though trees may serve many functions as plantings on a golf course, three particular types deserve special attention: boundary plantings, partition plantings, and background or enframement, plantings.

BOUNDARY PLANTINGS

The area along the border of its property or along the border of play, is one of the first parts of the course that should be developed, especially where unsightly views or other distractions interfere with the golfers' concentration, enjoyment, or comfort. Nearby streets, busy industrial or business sections, or other golf course facilities are a few of the areas which should be screened from view. If space is available along the border, an effective planting of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs can be developed, with occasional groups of flowering trees planted for seasonal beauty. On courses which receive year-round use, evergreen plants should predominate. Where space is limited, more densely growing trees or shrubs will have to be used in a narrow type of planting. Again, avoid a straight row of plants if at all possible. Try to make the planting appear as natural as possible within the parameters dictated by the situation. The actual plant materials selected for a border planting will depend on a number of factors, including the nature of the distraction, the possible need for a fast-developing screen, space limitations, and environmental factors such as sun, shade, moisture, wind, soils, etc. On golf courses blessed with beautiful surroundings, plantings which block views should be avoided.

PARTITION PLANTINGS

Trees planted near the sides of fairways along the line of play are called partition plantings and serve several functions. They keep errant shots from crossing into adjacent fairways, they affect play as a physical obstruction and as a means of blocking or creating wind effects, and they contribute to the aesthetic appeal and privacy of the golf course.

Again, straight lines or rows of trees should be avoided. It's worth sacrificing a little fairway width in order to provide some depth to the tree planting along the side. Partition plantings should generally not create a solid mass of trunks, branches and leaves unless it is also being used as a screen. Interesting views and scenes should be left open, adding depth to the natural beauty of the course. One way to achieve this effect is to plant groupings of trees along the line of play. Groups planted near the end of a shot can serve as a direction guide and as a measure for the distance of play. They also provide shady spots which may be restful along the way. As a rule, plantings or individual

trees should be placed in the fairway only on the advice of a golf course architect. As discussed previously, groupings should contain uneven numbers of plants, spread at unequal distances apart. Each group should be individualistic, though each should have a center of interest, just as any other composition. When using the same tree species, mass two to three plants close together near the center to make that part seem larger and denser. Scatter the others more widely and irregularly. (As a practical matter, minimum spacing should still allow maintenance equipment to pass between.) Another approach is to make the dominant plant or plants in the grouping a different type than the others, either larger growing or different in shape, color and texture. Thus the secondary plants may be larger in number but smaller in size or more quiet in appearance. The dominant plants provide the accent while the secondary plants should be neutral material.

Tree groupings can be worked nicely into fairway contour mowing patterns, providing relief from the "football field" approach to fairway maintenance. Trees can be used effectively, and in fact are almost a necessity on the corners of dogleg holes. One large tree, used either by itself or in conjunction with smaller species, is usually more effective on the corner of a dogleg than a simple grouping of smaller trees.

Finally, if trees or shrubs must be used as 150-yard markers, select species which fit naturally into the surroundings and locate them as far into the rough as possible. Above all, *do not* purchase low-growing shrubs and plant them right next to the edge of the fairway. This not only creates an unfair obstruction to the golfer unfortunate enough to land behind it, but it is also distracting to the eye and way out of scale with the rest of the landscape!

BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK PLANTINGS

Background and framework plantings provide neutral settings for objects of interest and increase their visibility. Views from tee and green areas can be emphasized with the proper use of trees. Much can be done to influence the appearance of a golf hole, depending on the development of the framework planting. For example, planting low-growing trees can make the hole look more expansive. Conversely, it can be made to appear smaller by planting tall trees. Topography can be accented

by planting tall trees on high areas and smaller trees in low areas, or negated with tall trees in low areas and short trees on the hillsides.

Plantings behind and to the sides of a green contribute greatly to the appearance and playability of the area. They provide a beautiful setting and background, giving direction to the line of play and a definite perspective to judge the distance of the approach shot, especially on blind holes. As the golfer approaches a green, the plantings should give the illusion of an enclosure or a dead end. Up close it should resemble a funnel, with the spout leading off to the next tee. The use of low-growing or fine-textured trees behind a green may make the hole appear longer, while the use of large or coarse-textured plantings may make the hole seem shorter. One good approach to green-side planting is to place smaller trees (perhaps flowering trees) behind the green as the first tier and back them up with larger evergreen or shade trees. However, be sure to avoid planting rows of small and large trees. Stagger the plants irregularly or use groupings of trees for a more natural look. For the most part, plantings behind greens should be neutral in appearance, drawing attention to the green and not to themselves. In practical terms, trees should be kept far away from the green in order to avoid shade, root competition, litter, and air circulation problems.





(Opposite page) Although it is not usually recommended, straight row planting here protects nearby houses from errant shots. Green Valley Golf Club, California.

(Top) The clumping and irregular spacing of palm trees creates a natural appearance along the border of the Lost Tree Club, Florida.

(Above) Grouping of Austrian pines (center) provides background direction and perspective for this "blind" green. The 18th hole, Onondaga Country Club, New York.

A pleasant atmosphere can be created in the vicinity of the tee through the use of trees, which may provide shade, screen unpleasant views, block errant shots, or act as a windbreak. Trees placed near the tee should be closer to the edges toward the back of the tee and farther from the sides in front, to allow adequate clearance for a golf shot played from the rear of the tee. Consider the ultimate size of the trees and avoid those that might some day encroach on the clearance needed for the tee shot. Again, care must be taken in tree selection and placement so that adequate sunlight and air circulation are ensured.

Deciding on where to place trees on the golf course and selecting the tree species to be used go hand in hand. The best way to approach this dilemma is to completely review the area in question and analyze it in the abstract without thinking of any particular plants at all. Use the principles outlined above to aid in the analysis work. Then consult with a plant materials expert, whether he be the golf course superintendent, a trusted nurseryman, or a landscape specialist, to determine the best plants for the job. Above all, tree selection and placement should always be part of a comprehensive tree program which also includes a sound care and maintenance schedule.