



*A few well placed trees bestow depth and perspective to a golf hole. The sixth hole at Cypress Point, California.*

# Trees, Trees Everywhere

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**W**E ALWAYS HAVE FADS. In the 1950s it was hula hoops, ducktail haircuts, and souped-up cars. The 60s saw long hair, the Beatles, miniskirts, and fast food. The 70s produced small cars, health food, punk rock, and ecology movements. Now we are in the 80s and it's computers, aerobics, video games, and planting trees on golf courses.

Golf course superintendents and officials alike have developed a tree consciousness in recent years, it seems, and thousands of trees are being planted. The reasons are clear enough; trees provide a great deal of beauty and strategic interest to a golf course, and they can serve a variety of other important functions as well.

For example, well placed trees serve architecturally by:

- Increasing the challenge of golf holes. They guard doglegs and entrances to greens. They form chutes through which shots must be played, and force players to choose between routes of play or shot types.

- Indicating and controlling the line of play.

- Providing targets, especially where landing areas or greens are out of sight.

- Better defining targets, such as greens, that, without trees, would have only sky as a backdrop.

- Preventing errant shots from leaving the course property.

- Improving visibility of balls in flight, setting them off against a tall green backdrop.

- Providing reference points to help locate balls that have strayed from the ideal line of flight.

- Assisting golfers in judging distance by providing depth perception and proportion cues.

Trees also help to achieve aesthetic objectives, such as:

- Breaking up the monotony of green turf and preventing a barren look.

- Screening out disruptive sights.

- Connecting different course features by drawing lines of sight.

- Tying the course to the surrounding space by shaping that space, framing it, providing emphasis for pleasing focal points, and giving a sense of proper proportion.

- Decorating the landscape with plantings that provide variety, contrast and seasonal interest.

In addition, trees have several important engineering uses. They include:





- Influencing the normal flow of traffic and, where necessary, positively controlling it.

- Providing other golfers and adjacent properties a greater measure of safety from errant shots.

- Modifying environmental forces with windbreaks and shady places.

- Providing erosion control and preserving wildlife habitat.

Despite their many benefits, trees can turn out to be a real liability if they're used incorrectly and without much forethought. Poor species selection, improper placement on the course, and neglectful maintenance are three common errors seen on golf courses throughout the country.

Regretfully, there are no exacting, easy-to-follow specifications for selecting trees and placing them on the course. Because of the artistic nature of landscape design, good taste and good judgement are prerequisites for positive results. A thorough knowledge of tree characteristics and the proper application of design principles are also essential.

In the planning stages, however, knowing what *not* to do can provide a

solid basis for beginning a tree planting program. Thus, the following paragraphs reveal some of the most common "do's" and "don'ts" of using trees on golf courses, based on past efforts.

#### Species Selection

- Avoid using too many "trash trees." Such trees might be characterized by weak wood, excessive litter, shallow rooting habit, susceptibility to insects and disease, susceptibility to storm damage, producing heavy shade, and having a short life span. Trees with several of these characteristics should be particularly avoided. Such trees as willows, poplars, silver maples, Norway maples, Siberian elm, horse chestnut, most birches and certain eucalyptus species should be used sparingly, unless good alternatives are not available in a particular region. Check with your state university, county cooperative extension office, or a reputable local nursery for further information.

- Use a variety of species in the planting program. If only one or two tree species are used, the equivalent of a Dutch elm disease could destroy your efforts in short order.

- At the same time, avoid planting too many species in a single viewing area (e.g., on a single hole). Too many shapes, colors and textures distract the eye and detract from the continuity of the course.

- Avoid using naturally low branching species, such as spruce and beech in play areas. They are difficult to mow around and their low branches are unpopular with golfers. Pruning up their lower branches ruins their appearance.

- Don't use shrubs in play areas, especially as 150-yard markers located close to the fairway. Shrubs are out of scale in an area as large as a golf course. They are difficult to maintain and awkward to mow around, and they produce an unfair penalty to a golfer who happens to miss the fairway by only a few feet (when used as 150-yard markers). If shrubs must be used as 150-yard markers, place them as far away from the edge of the fairway as possible. A better marker choice would be the use of stakes, markers on trees, irrigation heads, flat markers placed in fairways, and markings on the score card as yardage indicators.

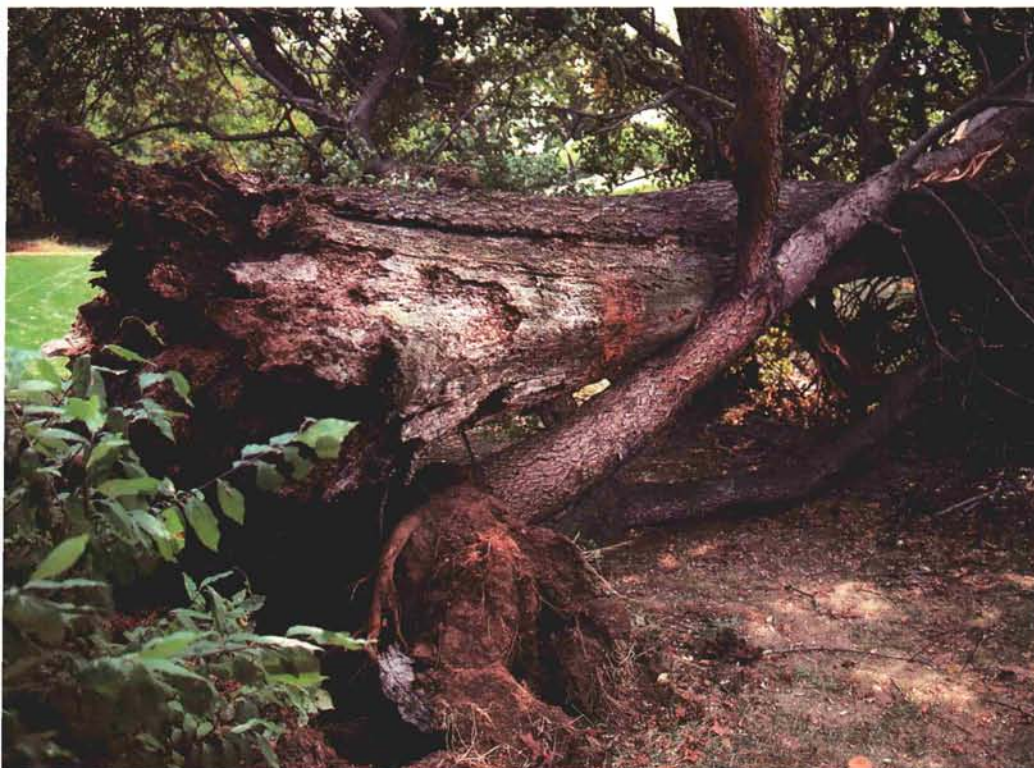




*(Opposite page) Sometimes fewer is better! Planting trees on this hole would do nothing but diminish the panorama of golf. Shinnecock Hills, New York.*

*(Left) This 150-yard marker shrub looks out of place and comes into play frequently on the corner of the dogleg hole. If a 150-yard shrub **MUST** be used, be sure to plant it in an inconspicuous place and away from play as much as possible.*

*(Below) Sooner or later, dead, dying and decaying trees must be removed. Sooner is safer.*



### Placing Trees on the Course

● Rather than overplanting trees for temporary effect, it often pays to plant only the number of trees ultimately required in an area. At most courses, it takes an act of Congress to move an established tree, so avoid overplanting *unless* the club will be willing to move or remove some of them when they become larger.

● When planting trees, use larger nursery stock that can be staked and protected and that will provide a faster effect. Small or seedling trees are hard to maintain around and usually end up being trampled by maintenance equipment or golf carts. There is also a tendency to plant small trees too close together.

● If hundreds or thousands of trees will be needed, as on a new course, it may be worthwhile establishing a tree nursery on site. If only small numbers of trees are needed, it is often more cost effective to simply purchase good quality stock from a reputable nursery. Personnel at most golf courses have neither the time nor the expertise to establish and properly maintain a tree nursery.

● Allow enough distance between trees in a planting. Maintenance equipment, particularly tractors pulling five- or seven-gang mowers, should have room enough to operate, and the trees should have enough space to fill out and develop some individual form.

● Avoid planting trees in straight lines or rows. It only takes three trees to do it. People enjoy golf courses for their natural appeal, and straight lines are not natural. Instead, plant trees in groupings and clumps, placing the individual trees and the clumps at unequal spacings to avoid an artificial look.

● Don't ring the back of a green with a semi-circle of trees. This appears artificial and contrived. Rather, offset the trees and place them in groupings with unequal spacings.

● Keep newly planted trees away from greens, tees and fairways. When planted too close, shade problems, poor air circulation and tree root competition often result. The edge of the crown of a mature tree should be no closer than 35



*Seedlings and small trees are most susceptible to mower and cart blight.*



feet from the edge of a green, so plant accordingly.

- Remember what the ultimate size of a selected tree will be, both in height and width. Most people have a hard time picturing just what a tree will eventually do to the landscape. Many trees are planted that ultimately block the use of a tee, or block off a reasonable approach shot from a fairway.

- Don't plant trees that obstruct views and scenes across the course. Many courses lend themselves to beautiful vistas. A reasonable number of trees can add depth to a scene, while too many trees can block it completely.

- Avoid planting trees that will block the view of sand bunkers from the tee or fairway, or that will block the shot out of a bunker toward the green. Most golfers have enough trouble climbing from a fairway sand bunker without having to negotiate a large tree, too. If a tree hazard is preferred to a sand hazard, then remove the bunker when the trees become larger.

- Some of the most beautiful scenes on a golf course are the views from tee to green. Avoid planting trees that will someday obstruct the view of the play of a hole unless it is absolutely necessary. This occurs most commonly on dogleg holes, where trees are planted as hazards. If a hole presents a picturesque scene, try instead to use sand bunkers or ponds as hazards.

- Keep trees far enough away from irrigation heads to avoid disfiguring the tree and creating gaps in irrigation coverage.

- It is not necessary to try to fill every void and open space on a golf course with trees. A mixture of trees and open space bestows depth to the landscape and provides the framework for beautiful vistas. Planting trees in every open space is initially expensive, is expensive to maintain, and robs the course of depth and perspective. Also, too many trees can be very frustrating for the average golfer, who knows that there's more to the crown of a tree than 90 percent air!

It should be remembered, too, that many trees produce many leaves, which can be a significant maintenance headache and a real nuisance to the golfer. A key word for tree planting on golf courses should be "moderation."

#### **Dealing With Existing Trees**

- Don't allow weed trees to continue growing in critical areas just because they become established there naturally. Prune out choke cherries, mulberries and other weed species as soon as they appear. They usually contribute nothing to the course and can become a real nuisance if allowed to become well established.

- Consider removing established trees if they obstruct beautiful views of the course, of sand bunkers or the play of a hole. There is nothing sacred about a tree that does a disservice to the beauty of a course or the play of a hole.

- Remember to maintain trees properly. Trees are considered valuable assets



on most golf courses, and they will live a long time if they're given some attention. Money should be set aside in the budget each year for pruning, pest control, fertilization, lightning protection, irrigation, and other tree maintenance.

- Perhaps most importantly, remove dead, dying, and decayed trees immediately. Allowed to remain, they are a real threat to people and property. So don't wait until after the lawsuit to remove these trees.

A recent statement by Frank Hannigan, Senior Executive Director of the USGA, sums up the feelings of many with respect to trees and golf courses:

"We've become victims of the arbo-retum syndrome. There are too many

trees on golf courses and too many trees in the wrong places.

"By wrong places, I mean approximate to targets. There's something very wrong in suffering an unplayable lie under a blue spruce when you miss the green on a 440-yard par-4 by 30 feet.

"Besides, too many trees tend to obscure the beauty of the game. They block out the sky, they rob us of the perspective of the roll and pitch of the land itself, they interfere with what were intended to be uninterrupted vistas from way out on the course back up to a stately clubhouse — they diminish the panorama of golf.

"The contemporary and mindless appeal of trees is remarkable. Any golf course superintendent could walk into the men's grill at one of your courses

on Wednesday at lunch time and announce that he was taking up a collection for one of his men whose left leg had been nearly severed at the knee that morning by a chainsaw. The reaction, at best, is going to be mild annoyance. One member, probably a doctor, since it's Wednesday, is likely to suggest that your guy should walk it off.

"But he could go into the same grill and say that he can get a terrific deal on 100 moraine locusts and people will throw money at him.

"Green committees over the years have treated courses like organic crossword puzzles by filling in all the blank spaces with trees. So I hope we'll be a little more careful about trees in the future."

*Trees, Trees, Everywhere  
drop  
Leaves, Leaves Everywhere*

