

Sometimes Mother Nature Needs a Little Help

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(Above) When Lightning strikes, can Thunder be far behind?

(Right) Tim Connelly (right) and Marvin Lynch (left) address Thunder and Lightning's next victim.



TREES CAUSE serious grass growing problems on golf courses, and their removal is often necessary when this occurs. Unfortunately, tree removal is not simple. Unless the tree is absolutely dead and falling over, people have a difficult time agreeing to remove it. As a result, some turf areas on many golf courses are consistently thin and weak.

A weed is defined as any plant which is growing out of place. A geranium in a bed of pansies is a weed, for example, and would be removed. Similarly, a tree that blocks sunlight or impedes air circulation alongside a green or tee could be considered a weed and should be removed if the situation is bad enough.

Today's golf course superintendent is charged with growing quality golf turf. The problems caused by shade, poor air circulation, tree root competition, and litter removal make this job difficult, if not impossible. It's a fact that the weakest greens, tees, and fairways on practically any golf course are those located in pockets of trees. The link between areas of weak turf and the proximity of

many trees is no coincidence. Strong turf near trees is the exception, not the rule.

This situation is well understood by golf course superintendents. Convincing others of the need to thin, prune, or remove these trees, however, is not easy even though the root of the problem is the tree, not a deficiency in the cultural maintenance program.

Herein lies the substance of my turf tip . . . helping Mother Nature improve turf conditions.

The thesis is simple; nobody can complain when the forces of Mother Nature remove trees from a golf course. Therefore, why not harness natural forces like thunder and lightning to help the process along?

A good example of putting Mother Nature to work was developed by Superintendent Tim Kennelly and Green Chairman Marvin Lynch at the Naval Academy Golf Club in Annapolis, Maryland. They named one chainsaw Thunder and another Lightning and proceeded to strike down the trees that were causing serious turf problems on their course.

This tongue-in-cheek turf tip actually has a serious message for many golf courses. Trees, shrubs, overhanging limbs, and underbrush can cause grass growing problems which adversely affect the superintendent's ability to grow healthy turf. A certain amount of tree work is needed on practically every golf course, despite the inevitable resistance from course officials and golfers-at-large.

Consider the following dialogue.

Golfer: "Whatever happened to the trees on the right side of the 10th tee?"

Kennelly/Lynch: "Thunder and Lightning got them."

Golfer: "Too bad."

Kennelly/Lynch: "By the way, have you noticed this is the first time in years that we've had a good stand of grass on that tee?"

Golfer: "Yes, it is. It's a shame about the trees, though. Guess we'll have to plant others to replace them."

The cycle will no doubt continue. However, it is reassuring to know that you do have Thunder and Lightning on your side.