

# *Pinus plastica:* A Simple Tool for Proper Tree Placement

*Use of a temporary "tree" can help avoid problems in the future.*

by PATRICK GROSS

**M**ANY golf courses today are built in conjunction with high-priced housing developments. Several conflicts naturally arise in this clash between golf courses and homes. Homebuyers are often promised beautiful views as they look at attractively rendered landscape drawings of their house next to the golf course. No thought is given to the potential for errant shots hitting their house and breaking through their kitchen window. If a problem does arise, the owner or developer's first course of action is to plant trees as a barrier. Several trees are planted to insure safety, much to the detriment of the golf course, the health of the trees, and even the beautiful view for which the homeowner paid a premium. Landscape drawings and plans are pretty to look at, but most people find it difficult to visualize the finished product, especially when it comes to tree placement.

Trees can be a maintenance headache or a beautiful addition to the golf course landscape. Trees are desirable on a golf course for many reasons:

- They are visually attractive and enhance the golf course landscape.
- They are challenging obstacles for the game of golf.
- They provide a barrier for errant shots, protecting nearby homes and people on adjacent fairways.
- They provide wildlife habitat.

Most of us are familiar with the many problems caused by trees, especially the over-planting of trees on the golf course:

- Excessive shade, making it difficult to grow healthy turf beneath the trees.
- Increased maintenance costs for pruning and routine cleaning of leaves and debris.
- Root encroachment into greens, tees, and other primary playing areas.
- Tree trunks and low-hanging limbs that disrupt irrigation spray patterns.
- Over-planting of trees causes competition for moisture and nutrients, resulting in weak tree growth and safety concerns.

When property owners began building multi-million-dollar homes adjacent to Pelican Hill Golf Club (California), Don Hoos, director of agronomy, had to be concerned with the placement of new trees on the golf course and how this would affect safety and the homeowners' ocean views. He came up with a simple method to demonstrate the impact of trees and provide a visual example to the people building homes on the golf course.

Don used a 20-foot length of 2-inch PVC pipe and placed it vertically where new tree plantings were called for in the landscape plan. The pipe was anchored with  $\frac{1}{4}$ " rope tied to the pipe approximately 15 feet up from the ground. The rope was tied to four stakes placed around the base of the pipe. Two sandbags were used to keep the pipe from moving. This plastic "tree" provided a good example of the eventual height and spread of the new tree. Don could also get an idea of how the tree would influence sprinkler coverage and safety, and how close to plant other trees if called for in the plan. The next step was to schedule an appointment with the new homeowner to talk about the placement of the tree and discuss any concerns. It was a great opportunity for good public relations with the new neighbor and helped avoid any conflicts in the future.

There are several good reasons for using this PVC "tree" prior to installing trees on the golf course:

- It helps the superintendent, course officials, and nearby homeowners get a better understanding of the mature size of the tree.
- It provides a visual estimate of the impact of a specific tree on safety, course architecture, shade, and its influence on surrounding trees.
- Any details can be investigated prior to planting, including the location of underground pipes, wires, drains, and sprinkler heads.
- The need for over-planting is avoided by placing trees in the right place.



*PVC pipe can be used as a simple tool to preview the position of trees on the golf course prior to planting.*

- The process saves labor and prevents damage to large specimen trees by getting the job done right the first time.

- It is an opportunity for good public relations with new homeowners.

This turf tip is appropriate when considering any new tree planting on the golf course. It is always best to get the job done right the first time. Using this method to plan the proper location for trees can help avoid costly mistakes, reduce potential liability, and decrease maintenance costs in the future.

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*PAT GROSS shares his planting tips for turf and trees with golf courses in the newly created Southwest Region. Pat was named director of the region in January 1998.*