

Searchable Native Plant Database Now Available

The Internet can now be used to find plants naturally suited to a particular region or habitat.

BY JEAN MACKAY

Choosing the correct native plants for golf course landscaping just got easier, thanks to a new Web-based search tool from Audubon International. "Surf Your Region and Surf for Native Plants" educates people about native plants specific to their region. Based on the *Landscape Restoration Handbook*, by Don Harker, the tool allows anyone to search for a plant list to guide tree or shrub selection on properties throughout the United States.

Using "Surf Your Region and Surf for Native Plants" is simple: type in your zip code and get a map, watershed information, and a plant list. The list can then serve as a reference when choosing trees and shrubs that are best suited for your golf course. "Surf Your Region and Surf for Native Plants" is accessible via the "Resources" section of Audubon International's Web site (www.audubon-international.org) and can also be found on a recently created Web site called Audubon Sustainable Communities (www.auduboncommunities.org).

WHY NATIVE PLANTS?

Native plants *originated* and *grow naturally* in a particular region or habitat. When you landscape with plants that are native to your region, you help to preserve not only the unique local character of your area, but also the overall biological diversity of North America.

Think of it this way: How many Bradford pears do we really want? Though lovely in spring, these natives

Landscaping with native plants has a number of well-recognized benefits:

- Maximizes habitat management efforts
- Provides food and cover for wildlife
- Provides a full complement of species in the plant communities on the course
- Reduces water, fertilizer, and chemical inputs
- Preserves the unique biological diversity of your region
- Reduces the need for high-intensity maintenance
- Helps the golf course become a valued part of local green space networks

of Korea and China do nothing to promote our own unique natural heritage. How many times can we appreciate flowering cabbage and kale in golf course landscape beds? Descended from Mediterranean vegetables, these plants can't compare with the beauty or wildlife value of our own fall flowering natives, like asters, coneflowers, or desert marigolds.

If we continue to make courses in Dallas look like courses in D.C., San Francisco, and Detroit, then we're missing the boat. Among the best things golf courses can offer to golfers and our environment alike is a round played amidst the spectacular beauty of each unique region. Using primarily native

plants in the golf course landscape achieves that worthy goal.

SURF YOUR REGION AND SURF FOR NATIVE PLANTS:

<http://www.auduboncommunities.org/regional/search/>.

JEAN MACKAY is the director of educational services for Audubon International, a non-profit environmental organization that focuses on environmental stewardship and sustainability. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and Audubon Signature Programs, sponsored by the USGA, have been helping golf courses implement environmental management practices since 1991. To find out more, visit www.auduboninternational.org.

