

Say No To Memorial Trees!!!

When remembering the departed, don't forget the turfgrass!

by DAVID A. OATIS

FROM the pyramids in Egypt to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, man has for centuries created memorials to the people who have shaped our world. Leaving memorials to loved ones is a popular custom, and planting a memorial tree or flower bed is a means of incorporating their memory in nature, thus insuring that their memory will live on. Memorial tree planting programs on golf courses seem a harmless and thoughtful means of remembering a loved one, but no well-intentioned program has greater potential for causing the ruination of the course. This statement may shock some, but consider the following:

Trees are an integral part of many courses and can perform a variety of valuable functions. Trees can add definition and strategy, improve safety, and add a wonderful naturalizing quality to the landscape. However, trees can also wreak havoc on golf courses. Between the shade and reduced air circulation caused by their canopies, and the competition caused by their root systems, trees can make it physically impossible to grow healthy turfgrass. They can cause severe playability problems. USGA Green Section agronomists have for years agreed: **Trees are the leading cause of turfgrass failure and poor performance in North America.**

Planting trees can be enjoyable, and healthy trees can provide years and even generations of satisfaction. However, the negative effects that result from a poorly chosen or located tree are just as persistent. Donating money for planting trees is a noble gesture, but purchasing and planting the tree is usually the cheapest part of the enterprise. The years of additional expense that result are rarely understood or considered. Trees must be trimmed around and their debris must be picked up. Trees often require pruning and some require pest control programs. The eventual cost of removal must also be considered, and this can be substantial and disruptive. Trees can elevate the cost of turfgrass mainte-



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nance tremendously, but even with increased fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, the resulting turf still may not perform up to expectations. Living with poor turf is often the price of having too many trees or having the wrong trees in the wrong locations.

Courses with memorial tree planting programs usually find themselves plagued with tree-related problems more quickly than other courses because they are forced to “look for places to plant trees!” Every open spot on the course becomes a potential tree planting site and little thought is given to long-term implications. With a memorial program, the goal becomes to plant trees rather than to accomplish some specific objective through tree planting. This puts the cart squarely in front of the horse. Even more significant, once a memorial tree is planted, it becomes a sacred cow that cannot be removed short of an act of God. Memorials are intended to be forever, and it can be extremely upsetting to the friends and family of the deceased if it becomes necessary to remove a memorial tree. Placing memorial plaques on individual trees also is costly, labor intensive, and in time can cause the course to take on a cemetery-like appearance. Memorial planting programs are easily started, but like runaway trains, they are not easily stopped.

If you remain unconvinced and still wish to have a memorial tree program, at least set it up so that it has a chance of achieving success. Make it a “Memorial Tree Fund” providing the funding for the life cost of the trees. This would include the cost of planting, maintenance, and removal. Instead of placing plaques on individual trees, place the names of those being memorialized on a plaque prominently located in the clubhouse. However, trees should only be planted when necessary. All plantings should have a specific purpose and be approved by the green committee, golf course architect, and course superintendent.

Golf courses belong to the living, and in the final analysis we must remember their purpose. Golf courses are intended to be neither cemeteries nor memorial parks; they are the playing field on which the game is played and must be maintained as such. Trees should never be planted on a golf course without a specific goal in mind, and trees should never be planted by quota. Don't plant trees just for the sake of planting trees. Resist the temptation to initiate a memorial tree planting program; say no to memorials!

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