

# GAINING A NEW PERSPECTIVE

*Enhancing pond shorelines with native aquatic plants.*

by STEVEN VISOSKY

**I**N THE LAST several years, aquatic and shoreline plants have become an accepted and even desirable alternative to manicured pond edges on golf courses. Though new golf courses have an opportunity to create naturalized water features during construction, existing facilities are faced with retrofitting to achieve the benefits that aquatic plants bring to the golf setting. At Cordillera Resort's Mountain Course in Edwards, Colorado, that's just what we did — and we've been very pleased with the results.

## The Setting

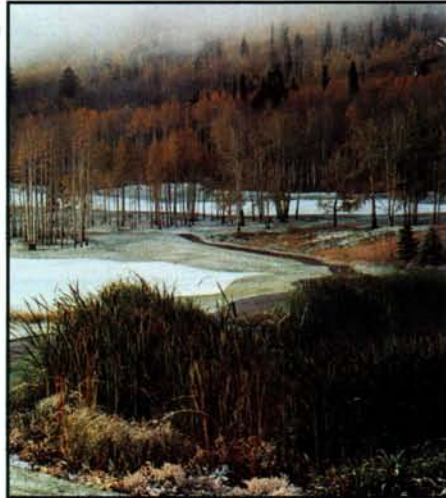
Hole #16 at Cordillera Mountain Course is a beautiful par five with a 1.5-acre lake near the tee. When the course first opened in July 1994, bluegrass was sodded to the water's edge. There were three full-circle heads that watered this area, but unfortunately, they watered the lake as well. In 1997, we decided that a more natural look would provide an attractive landscape feature that would also promote habitat for ducks and other wildlife.

## One Step at a Time

A project of this magnitude requires careful planning and execution. To start, we outlined several goals to help direct our efforts. First, we wanted to increase wetland wildlife habitat while enhancing the aesthetics of the lakefront. Thus we chose a variety of native Colorado plants that would add color and provide food and cover for wildlife. Equally important, we wanted to reduce water waste by moving the irrigation heads and only throwing water towards the beds and turf.

The next step in our project was to hire a local environmental consultant, Montane Environmental Solutions, Ltd., to help with plant selection. They provided an extensive list of appropriate shrubs, wetland plants, border perennials, and wildflowers.

To prepare the site, we removed a 4-foot strip of bluegrass along the lake and moved and adjusted the three problem irrigation heads so that they would no longer water the lake. The



*Natural landscaping along the lake bank on hole #16 at the Cordillera Mountain Course (Edwards, Colorado) provides an attractive water feature that promotes habitat for ducks and other wildlife.*

area was rototilled and planted with many different varieties of plants. Cattails (*Typha* sp.), three square bulrush (*Scirpus americanus*), hairy sedge (*Carex lanuginosa*), and torrey rush (*Juncus torreyi*) were among the wetland plants chosen to provide duck habitat. More than 50 native perennials and wildflowers, including pink yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Rocky Mountain columbine (*Aquilegia caerulea*), asters (*Aster* spp.), and scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*), create a mosaic of color that lasts throughout the growing season.

Maintaining the new plantings requires hand pulling weeds from the beds, mulching when needed, and replacing plants that do not make it through the winter. Because we are especially careful about avoiding chemical applications in the buffer zone near the lake, our labor needs have increased by three or four man-hours per week in this area.

## Results

We have been very pleased with our results, and in fact we have met all of our goals. We gained a three- to four-foot buffer of native Colorado plants that provides wildlife habitat, improves

aesthetics, protects water quality, and eliminates water waste.

For the first time, we had two pairs of ducks use the lake for nesting in 1998 and 1999. We also have seen an increase in the number of ducks just using the lake for everyday feeding and resting.

We've had a great response from golfers and members, too. Our green committee has been highly complimentary and is considering aquatic landscaping for another lake on the property.

We also have reduced the amount of water used in this area by 50%. By changing just three irrigation heads, we save approximately 35,000 gallons of water during our growing season from May to September.

## Perspectives

In retrospect, it would have been a lot easier to do this project before they laid the sod. If you are involved in new golf course construction or pond construction or renovation, I would definitely recommend landscaping with aquatic and shoreline plants, rather than turfgrass, from the outset.

If your only choice is to retrofit, it's still worth it. Native aquatic plantings can be a wonderful resource if you have shoreline at your facility that is not directly in play, yet is in a visible area. Research is very important in determining which plants are most suitable for your area, and a local consultant may prove to be helpful. Discuss with your golfers the benefits of enhancing wildlife habitat along with improving the aesthetics of your shoreline. The results can be rewarding for both golfers and wildlife.

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STEVEN VISOSKY is the golf course superintendent at the Cordillera Mountain Course, an 18-hole resort guest and semi-private golf course in Edwards, Colorado. Cordillera Mountain Course achieved designation as a **Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary** in January 2000. Cordillera Resort's Short Course and Valley Club are also registered members of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.