

Growing, Growing, Gone!

Use common sense when planting trees on your golf course.

BY LARRY GILHULY

"A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit." — Rudyard Kipling

"A golf course grows great when trees are planted in the right locations and whose shade, roots, and size do not cause problems with turf growth and playing conditions." — USGA Green Section

While Kipling may not have had golf courses in mind with his timeless quote, there is no question that many golf courses today suffer from the wholesale planting of trees many decades ago with little thought to the full size of the trees. This epidemic has come home to roost in the form of massive tree removal programs on several top golf courses throughout the country as well-informed memberships are beginning to understand the negative impacts of trees on surrounding turf.

THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this brief discussion is to suggest how to avoid the major pitfalls of tree planting. All too often trees are planted on golf courses without seriously considering the following questions:

- How tall and wide will the tree be when fully grown?
- Where will the shade of the tree fall in relation to the greens, tees, and landing zones?
- Will the roots of the trees be at or near the surface, causing injury to players and damage to mowers?

- How long will the tree live?

There are several other criteria for tree selection (shape, color, disease resistance, etc.) that are involved in the selection process, but making a mistake in any of the preceding "Big 4" areas can result in premature tree removal and all of the associated emotional issues generally noted at golf courses with poor tree planting schemes.

THE SOLUTION

It is amazing how simple it is to avoid the "plant and pull" syndrome noted at many golf courses, yet the same mistakes occur time and again due to poor plant selection and placement. Use the following guidelines to make your golf course great.

Plant all trees with the full size in mind! A common mistake in the Pacific Northwest is the use of massive trees (primarily firs, redwoods, Western red cedar, and maples) for the purpose of "strengthening the course" either immediately or in the near future. *Avoid this mindset!* Trees that will grow more than 100 feet and spread 10-15 or more yards in each direction need plenty of room and years to grow before they produce the type of results often desired by the "strengthen the course" crowd.

Avoid short-lived trees with roots near the surface and limbs that are brittle! Every part of the country has trees that damage mowers, grow fast, die within 3-5 decades, and drop substantial limbs and debris at the hint of a breeze. Avoid these types of trees, even if they are donated.

Always plant with shade in mind! When trees and turf square off, trees always win the competition for water, sunlight, and fertilizer. Avoid planting large trees on the south side of greens, tees, and critical fairway landing zones. If large specimen trees must be planted, avoid filling every open space with trees. The great golf courses allow individual trees to stand alone, developing full shapes and allowing for openings between the trees.

Use professionals to assist in placement and tree selection! It may be tempting to add trees with the help of your golf course superintendent, golf professional, and Green Committee, but it is best to use the services of a trained arborist for tree selection and a qualified golf course architect for the placement to avoid mistakes.

We can all learn from Kipling and plant long-lived trees! Many portions of the country have beautiful oaks and other grand species that seem to take forever to grow. However, great golf courses were planted and planned by "old men in whose shade they knew they would never sit." If you choose to ignore these simple guidelines in tree planting, then you will face an unfortunate future of "growing, growing, gone" with the trees on your golf course.

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