By David A. Oatis, regional director, Northeast Region

Understanding the origins of tree use on golf courses will help solve tree problems on your golf course. We climbed trees as youngsters and built forts in them. We enjoyed their fruit, their foliage and their fall color. We use their wood to build homes and enjoy their shade. We now know how they have influenced golf course architecture and design.

With cool air and shorter days it is evident that fall has arrived. While the brilliant fall foliage is aesthetically pleasing, it also should be recognized for its potential threats to the turf and irrigation systems that support it.

Trees are used on nearly 70% of America’s golf courses as part of the landscape design. If you have a large number of trees on your course, you may think you have a natural advantage over those courses in the South that have almost no trees. However, the reality is that the problems that trees pose to turfgrass and golf courses can be problematic in the North as well.

The number of courses with trees has grown in recent years as the demand for a more natural look in landscape design has increased. The challenge of integrating trees into these landscapes has increased designers’ awareness of the potential benefits of trees and their turfgrass and irrigation systems. Now more than ever, it is important to properly plan and manage trees on your course.

So how can trees possibly be bad for golf courses? In order to gain a thorough understanding of the problems that trees pose to turfgrass and golf courses, it is necessary to first understand the history of tree usage on golf courses.

As mentioned, trees provide many benefits to the environment. Trees provide shade, filter pollutants, cool the air, and provide a natural habitat for wildlife. They can even improve the aesthetics of a golf course, providing a natural environment that is familiar to many golfers.

Golf courses have long been seen as a natural and aesthetic environment, and trees are often included as part of the landscape design to enhance this environment. However, trees can also pose problems to the turfgrass and irrigation systems that support the course.

For example, trees can interfere with the irrigation system by shading the grass and reducing the amount of water that reaches the turf. This can lead to poor turf health and decreased playability.

In addition, trees can also attract pests such as nematodes and these pests can cause damage to the turf. Trees can also provide a habitat for pests such as leaf blower and can also be a source of disease such as powdery mildew.

It is also important to consider the potential impact of trees on the irrigation system. Trees can block the flow of water and reduce the efficiency of irrigation systems. Trees can also cause physical damage to irrigation systems such as tearing or breaking pipes.

Finally, it is also important to consider the potential impact of trees on the turf. Trees can cause physical damage to the turf such as tearing or breaking it. Trees can also cause the turf to become damaged by shading the grass and reducing the amount of light and water that reaches the turf.

In conclusion, trees can be a valuable asset to a golf course, providing shade, filtering pollutants, and improving the aesthetics of the landscape. However, it is important to properly plan and manage trees on a golf course to ensure that they do not pose problems to the turf or irrigation systems.

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