



## Are There Too Many Trees On Your Golf Course?



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**THE SHADY EXPANSE OF TREES THAT FRAMES A CLUBHOUSE OR SERVES AS A BACKDROP TO THE FIRST TEE CAN BE ONE OF THE 'SIGNATURE' LOOKS FOR A CLUB.**

On the golf course, though, large blocks of shade and the accompanying tree root systems can be detrimental to healthy turf, and if you've proposed a tree removal program at your club, chances are you've run into some opposition.

People like trees; it's against our nature to see them cut down. How do you ensure a tree is an asset to the club rather than a negative influence on golf course conditions?

A golf course architect is a great resource when it's time to examine tree management at a golf course. Having

an outside expert who objectively evaluates how trees impact your course, from the standpoint of design strategy, playability, maintenance, turf health and aesthetics, can give your superintendent the support they need when proposing changes.

While you're investigating whether to undertake a tree management program, here are some guidelines to consider:

**Allow for vital air movement and exposure to sunlight.** Poor air circulation, specifically on greens, results in soaring temperatures and humidity during the summer, that in turn, promotes ideal conditions for disease development. Dense shade throughout the year produces cooler soil temperatures in the shaded areas.

Lower temperatures retard turf growth rate, leaving grass vulnerable to damage from wear and compaction. Where poor air circulation and restricted sunlight penetration cause unacceptable turf loss, tree removal is necessary, especially at greens and tees.

**A blockade of trees is not a substitute for careful routing.** No matter how many trees are planted to protect players on an adjacent hole, the odds are a wayward shot will find its way through the canopy. If the intent is to protect players in adjacent fairways, plant trees of appropriate mature shape, size and density near the tees in strategic locations.

The physical and psychological impact of the trees will reduce the number of errant shots going off-line. Leave gaps between adjacent fairways near the landing areas to allow players with stray shots to have a probable chance for a "scrambling" recovery.

**Keep trees well away from greens and tees – they out-compete turfgrass for available water and nutrients.** The idea that tree roots do not extend further from the trunk than the drip line of the tree is just not true. The reality is, from the trunk, tree roots can reach one to one-and-a-half times, or more, the total height of the tree.

Where tree roots are a problem, sever them with a trencher specifically designed for root pruning. These machines make clean pruning cuts. Respect the base of the tree by pruning no closer to the trunk than five times the diameter of the trunk.



Install a barrier that will deflect roots. Be wary of underground utilities when root pruning.

**Keep or restore scenic vistas.** Trees can screen (or frame) scenic vistas such as the ocean, mountain or other views off property, the clubhouse, or lakes, marshes and other open areas of the course, including other golf holes. Once a scenic vista is lost, it is usually forgotten.

It may be lost forever if the vegetation has become part of an environmental area. Review photos of your course taken during its early years before trees have reached their current height and density. Is there a scenic vista that you can restore? If yours is a “classic” course, the original design likely sported few trees.

By removing trees, are there original design features you can expose and incorporate into today’s course strategy? When budgeting for tree removal, include costs to cut, haul, and dispose of trees and limbs, stump grind, clean up, and seed or sod.

**Flowering trees add beauty to any course...but be cautious.** The beauty of flowering trees is undeniable. However, they are considered ornamental vegetation, not strategic elements, so flowering trees should be located away from play areas. Masses of color are best appreciated from a distance.

Augusta National is a notable example where dogwoods, redbuds and other flowering ornamentals have been planted in reduced-play areas and are appreciated from afar. Plan carefully if decorative trees are to accent tee locations.

**If planting trees, install no more than the maintenance staff can adequately grow-in and maintain long-term.** During establishment, newly installed trees need frequent watering. The frequency and amount varies with the sizes of the installed trees, the soil type, exposure, climate, and if the trees are meant to “survive” or “thrive.”



Include irrigation materials costs and labor-over-time (for hand-watering) in the budget.

Some clubs choose to purchase trees in large quantities because of cost, and establish tree nurseries. For ease of establishment, locate a nursery as near as possible to an irrigation source. The nursery stock can be transplanted as scheduled over the next several years. Transplant before the trees become too large for the staff to handle.

**Create a tree management plan.** A good tree-planting program on any golf course begins with a long-range plan. Remember, there is no need to fill every space. The agronomic impact of misplaced trees is commonly seen in the form of shade, root competition and poor air circulation.

Be mindful of the mature sizes of the selections and how much work the trees will generate if the wrong plant is in the wrong place, e.g., too close to greens, tees, bunkers, rest stations, and cart paths.

Choose trees that are indigenous to the area, are improved varieties or cultivars, and are characteristic of the vegetation already on-site. Thoughtful tree planting should not add substantially to the maintenance

of the golf course via re-sodding, tree pruning, leaf blowing, or litter removal.

Thoughtful tree planting and removal *should* improve the appearance, design strategy and playability of your course. **BR**

*Jan's experience as a certified arborist, registered landscape architect and former assistant superintendent, provide her with a unique outlook on the playability, strategy, ecology, and economics of golf courses. Before establishing her own firm, Jan worked with Fazio Golf Course Designers. She is a member of the International Society of Arboriculture and the American Society of Landscape Architects.*

*ASGCA has a number of resources to help club and course managers learn about planning and remodeling. The "Q & A" series of brochures tackles the subjects of master planning, remodeling, golf course development and selecting a golf course architect. Also, ASGCA has published a helpful chart that lists the average "life cycles" of various components of a golf course. For more information on these and other ASGCA materials, visit the website at [www.asgca.org](http://www.asgca.org) or call (262) 786-5960.*