

The Idaho Golf Course Superintendents Association

Grass Clippings

April 2025

29th Super/Pro Golf Challenge

This longstanding opportunity for key team members to gather each year is a tool to help strengthen the relationships among a facility's key employees — which benefits the facility operations as a whole! When we gather, we know informative conversations always take place.

Join us at the Jerome Country Club for the 29th annual Super/Pro Challenge in Jerome, Idaho, situated “With purple mountains to the north and the majestic Snake River to the south.”

Registration is open for the event on Thursday, June 12, with a 10:00 a.m. shotgun. Our hosts are Bart Brandell, golf course superintendent, and Alex Nixon, head PGA professional.

Everyone is welcome to play as we offer a second flight to accommodate teams other than turf and proshop management. Hole sponsors are also greatly appreciated!

To register, please visit the calendar event of our website, idahogcsa.org. Please register by June 5 for play and to sponsor a hole, please commit by May 29 to ensure signage.



GCSAA Leadership Symposium

Paul Venable
Warm Springs Golf Course

Recently I attended the GCSAA Chapter Leader/Executive Symposium in Lawrence, KS. I would like to thank the chapter and the GCSAA for this opportunity. It was a really great

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idahogcsa.org

2025 Northwest GCSA Turfgrass Expo

(aka — An Incredible Opportunity, again)

This conference is being held for the third time due to its exceptional value. The four-year lapse between these special gatherings allows attendees to experience a deserving sense of anticipation and excitement.

This is a valuable opportunity — whether you are experiencing the bustling trade show, an informative conference room, great conversations in the hallway, or even enjoying discussions on the golf course, this is where it happens — with your peers at an event-filled conference. At the Northwest GCSA Turfgrass Expo, taking place on October 13 & 14, 2025, at The Coeur d'Alene, you'll be captivated by speakers who have been meticulously selected for their ability to engage and connect with audiences, complementing their vast knowledge in their respective fields.

The expo's master of ceremonies will be Dane Gamble, a highly respected superintendent at Bridger Creek Golf Course in Bozeman, Mont. We are excited to share more information in the near future.

New High with Silent Auction

We are grateful for the generous support from the courses in the region. Your donations of rounds for our annual silent auction held during the Boise Golf Show have been instrumental in reaching new heights. Every donation, no matter how small, has contributed to our success, and we are thrilled to announce that we have surpassed our previous record, with an initial total of \$18,000.

Our auction committee, led by Travis Rose, worked diligently to connect with our superintendents and secure the necessary rounds.

Ken Thornock and Jason Sigmund and of The Valley Club played a crucial role in distributing the rounds with handwritten notes. We also want to express our gratitude to Brian Mickels, CGCS, Charisse Rose, and daughter, Mack, for their invaluable assistance at the booth.

Thank you to all involved who made the auction a success!



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Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

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Info about Idaho GCSA website!

- * Do you have an address change? Changing the information on Your Profile in the Member's Area will automatically update the association's database! Use of proper capitalization and spelling is appreciated.
- * Do you have any classified items? Please be sure to complete the classified section in the Member's Area.
- * **Your username is always your email address. To set your password click on forgot password and follow the prompts.**
- * Be sure to check the job announcements on a regular basis

"The Idaho Golf Course Superintendents Association is dedicated to helping its members provide the best playing conditions in an environmentally friendly manner."

Springtime is here — time to start thinking about our next golf season and checking with last year's staff to see who's coming back and starting to bring in new crew members. For me that also signifies clearing snow from greens and other areas to see how the turf below has wintered.

This year is a little different, though. This spring we are hosting the FIS Ski World Cup Finals. In the skiing world, this is kind of a big deal... the final ski race of the season for the top skiers in the world, and the last chance of the season to make final impressions before next year's Winter Olympics. The week-long event will draw in thousands of visitors to our community for ski races, downtown concerts, and many other social events.

I don't have to help with the race course preparations on the mountain, but I did get volunteered to help for another skiing event. For the first time in our resort's history, we are hosting a skijoring competition in Sun Valley. So, before getting to start golf preparations, I needed to assist in helping to build a skijoring race



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President's Message

This Spring is Different

Alex Bliss, President
Sun Valley/ElkHorn GC, Sun Valley, Idaho

event. This would end up with me spending 60 hours sitting in a snowcat pushing and shaping an 800-foot-long race course with banked turns and multiple jumps for skiers.

For those who don't know or haven't heard about skijoring, it is a competition where horses pull skiers with a rope behind them. It's a team event consisting of a horseback rider and skier. The horse pulls the skier along a designated course. Along that course there are gates the skier must successfully navigate through, while also collecting rings that are hung on the course. It's a timed event; missing a ring or missing a gate is a time penalty affecting your overall time. The best competitors are a team of a fast, fearless horse and a strong skier. The race course I helped to build consisted of a large banked turn with two aerial jumps the skier had to navigate.

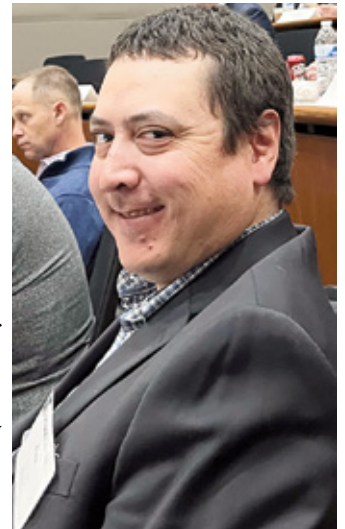
I had the opportunity to see a few races earlier in the winter, but this would be the first time building and helping with such an event. Building anything out of snow in late March can be a challenge. Lacking snow and warm melting temperatures can be frustrating conditions. What would normally take a day or two in the middle of winter to build took us nearly a week to build due to warm spring-winter weather. We had an average winter with a couple of feet of snow left on the valley floor when starting the work, but we needed more to build the jumps for the race

course. It took two full days of plowing and stockpiling snow for all the features, then two

more days of shaping jumps and fine-tuning the grade of the race course. It's surprising to me that the lane the horses run on only has about four inches of snow for the safety of the horses. Too much more than that and it becomes a safety issue of them injuring themselves or their riders.

After four long days of work, it was time for the race itself. The skijoring race was held on a day there weren't any alpine World Cup races, so we were hoping for a good turnout from all people in town for the real racing. The skijoring race had 48 teams and competitors from all over the western states. We had a beautifully sunny day and surprisingly had 1,000 or so spectators come out to watch the teams compete. All the hard work paid off — everyone loved the event. A lot of the competitors who do this race circuit all winter said this was the best race event they had all season. It was a great way to cap off their winter.

It was a great pleasure to be a part of something special for the company and
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**Congratulations to
Brian Roth, CGCS,
elected to the GCSAA
Board of Directors at
the 2025 Annual
Meeting in San Diego!**

Roth is the superintendent at Oquirrh Hills Golf Course in Tooele, Utah. He is a past president of the Idaho GCSA and Utah GCSA.



President's Article continued from page 3



the community where I live. In the ski world, hosting the World Cup is the equivalent of hosting a major in golf. It was amazing seeing our company pull off such a great event so seamlessly and I'm lucky I got to be a small part of it.

Leadership Symposium continued from page 1



experience. In less than two days, I toured GCSAA headquarters, gained useful education, and got to meet and network with other superintendents from around the country. I feel like I gained a lot from this unique experience, not to mention Kansas City BBQ and "Duck Fat Fries."

The symposium held at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence,



Kan., offers a platform for association leaders from around the country to share ideas as the annual event provides leadership training, development, and support to chapters.

For future board officers, I definitely recommend attending the symposium if given the opportunity. (Lori Russell, Brent Austin (IE), Old Tom, Brandon Barkley (PP), and Paul Venable ID)

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My Journey to Golf Maintenance

Alex Helquist

The Club at Spurwing, Meridian, Idaho



I started out like every kid playing sports outside from sunup to sundown, and sundown is even questionable. I can't even remember the number of times my parents had to bring me in well after dark. The routine was play, eat dinner, go back out to play. I mean, don't install a floodlight in the backyard if you weren't expecting me to stay

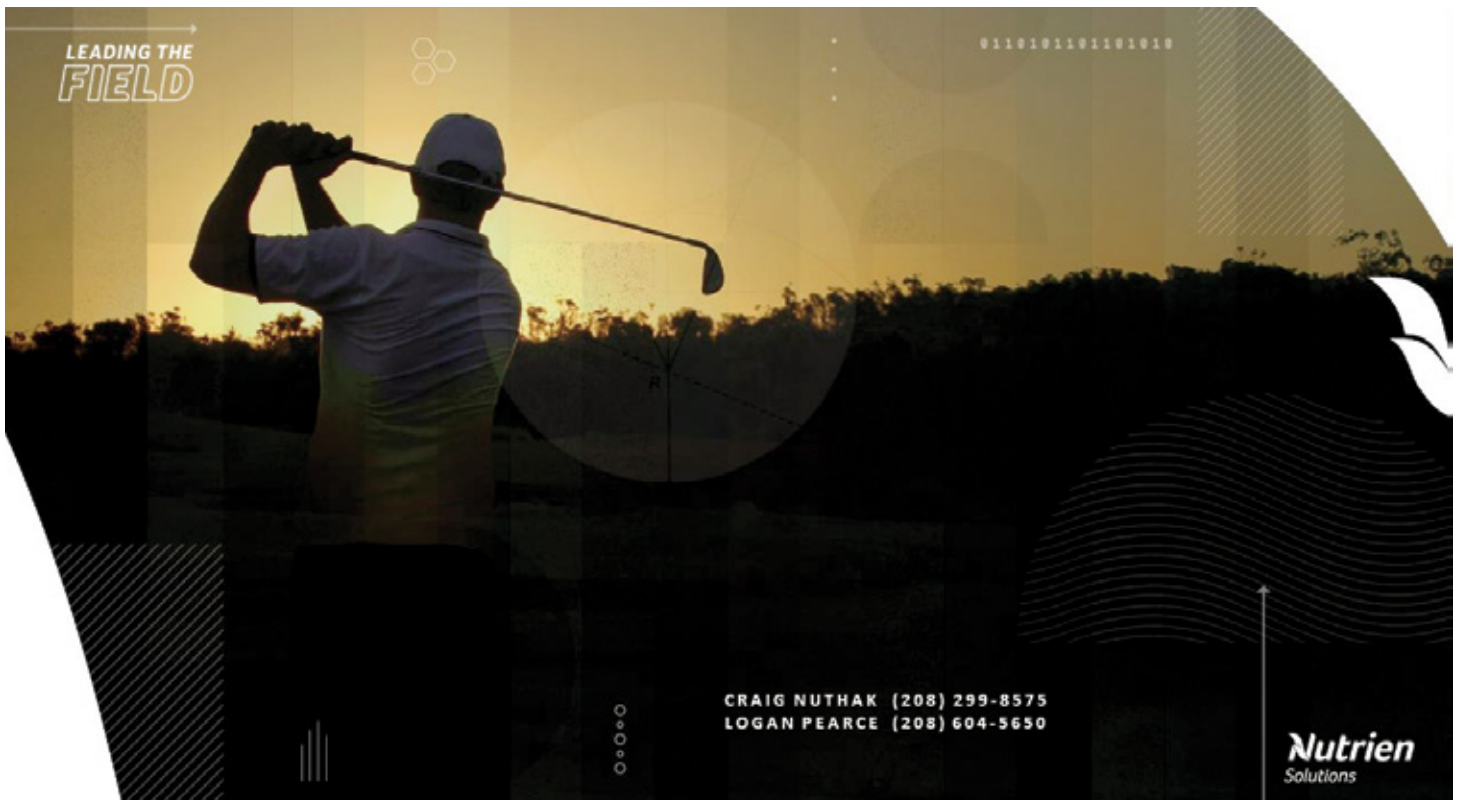
out there all night. It didn't matter what sport it was. Basketball was my first love and shooting hoops was the easiest thing to do, but I was content scoring goals on a fake soccer goalie and throwing a baseball up in the air and catching it over and over again. I thought my ticket in life was going pro in sports one way or another, much like every kid.

Maybe I had a chance, maybe I didn't, but towards the end of my freshman year of high school everything changed. I played three sports: basketball, football, and baseball, and didn't want to miss anything, ever. I remember going to optional football practices right after school, to actual baseball practice, and finally finishing up with basketball open gym. I was at school all day then I would come home, do homework, go to bed, and wake up in the morning to do it all over again, and that was just on the

weekdays. On the weekends I would beg to be dropped off at the YMCA so I could run pickup basketball from the time they opened until the time they closed. I thought I was invincible, but all this use caught up with me one Sunday when I finally sat out from a game.

I had taken a little break, probably because my team lost, although I'll never admit it. When I went to play the next game, I couldn't really bend my left knee and it was swollen to the size of a grapefruit. My knees were never the best and I always had a little bit of pain from time to time, but it was never serious. My parents and I all figured we'd put some ice on it and the next morning I would be good to go. Well, this time, that wasn't the case. My knee stayed swollen for quite some time and wasn't getting any better, but I still never missed a practice or game which probably caused more damage and made things worse. Eventually, after meeting with several doctors, I was diagnosed with Osteochondritis Dissecans. Basically, a fancy way of saying the end of the femur died and I was going to require surgery in order to fix it. The first surgery went well and the doctor was able to cut the cartilage away from my knee, remove the dead bone, shave bone from my left hip, pack it back into my knee, and screw the cartilage back over the top. So I was healed, right? Oh, did I wish that was the case. My doctor told me I would probably never play basketball again (I did), and to maybe think about taking up swimming or cycling (I did not). After a second

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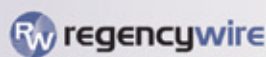


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My Journey continued from page 6

surgery to remove the screws, and extensive physical therapy, I thought I was good to go. I began summer practices for football all for the same disease to return shortly before the football season was about to start, and I started the process all over again, only this time in the right knee, which eventually ended up needing three surgeries.

Anyway, through all of this and essentially losing my dream, I stayed focused on school. My dad always told me there were only three ways I was getting to college: athletic scholarship, academic scholarship, or paying for it myself. Well option one was gone, option three didn't sound appealing, so option two it was. Luckily, I kept my grades on track and chose to attend Lewis-Clark State College to pursue a degree in biology with the hopes of one day going to medical school and becoming a doctor.

With all of my surgeries, I had gone through extensive physical therapy and with my dream of becoming a doctor I would volunteer at Gridiron Physical Therapy when I was off on breaks, which is where I met Ryan Meredith as he was going through PT on his torn ACL. He mentioned they love hiring college kids to work at the golf course during the summer and obviously I needed a job. I ended up working at the River Club, formerly Plantation Country Club, every summer through school and even after I graduated. I loved it. The schedule was great, besides some of those weekend morning shifts after turning 21, and I got a sense of fulfillment from the job but my goals were in a different area.

After graduating, I started to apply to medical schools over

and over again without a whole lot of success. I made the second round of interviews a number of times but never got to the interview process. After all, I was a kid from Idaho with mediocre test scores that may have chosen having fun in college over reading a textbook (I did say those morning weekend shifts were tough). So, after what felt like wasting multiple thousands of dollars of my parents' money, I decided I should make golf course maintenance my career.

The next year after making this decision, Ryan appointed me assistant superintendent and I really began to learn what goes into this industry. I was always willing to work and learn, but I had no idea how much else goes into maintaining a golf course. The plan we all have in our heads for the day rarely ever comes to fruition. Hiring a staff is nightmare inducing. Greens covered in snow and ice is never a good thing. Being at or below the water table just means more flooding when the river is running high. Irrigation rarely, if ever, works properly. Tournaments mean coming in early and coming back at night, and managing whatever staff you can find is always a challenge. Through everything, I fell in love with the job and couldn't get enough of it.

Eventually Ryan got a new job over at The Club at Spurwing and although I had my reasons for staying (and leaving) the River Club, which I had called home for seven years, I reached out to see if I could move on to a different club. In September of 2019, I started as the assistant superintendent at a new place, eventually rising to superintendent in 2022, where I still am today. I couldn't imagine a better place to be, and with all the twists and turns, I couldn't be happier to end up where I am with a bright future ahead of me.



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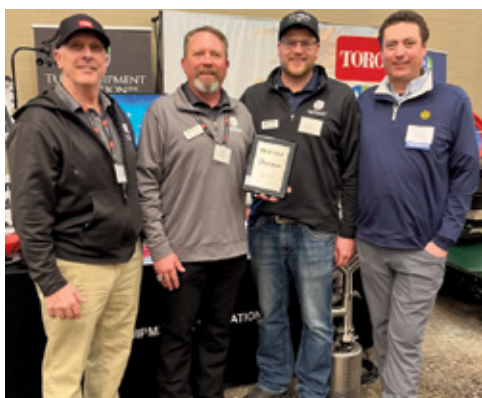
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Sean Parsons

Director of Agronomy, Tamarack Resort

My first visit to Osprey Meadows at Tamarack Resort was in August 2022. Landscapes Unlimited already had a crew on-site finishing up the range and starting work on the north side of the property. This is where the transformation happened to create the new “Gambler’s Hole”—a Par 3 played over a pond from five different tee boxes. For those who played before the course closed in 2014, this used to be the third hole. Now, it serves as a playoff hole or a fun setup for special events for members and resort guests.

The course had been untouched since the spring of 2014.



When we took a ride around the property, we were cruising down fairways with six-foot-tall weeds and grasshoppers smacking us in the face. Bunkers had trees growing in them, tee boxes looked like cobblestone paths, and the greens were dry, random patches of wasteland — with the original cups still buried in the parched turf. The maintenance shop? Basically, a storage shed filled with everything the resort decided

to keep: screen doors, old jet skis... you name it. What was missing? Mowers. Setting a goal to reopen nine holes in 2023 and shoot for a grand reopening in summer 2024 felt ambitious — maybe even crazy.

For me, though, the opportunity to work with the RTJ team and take on the challenge of bringing a once-great course back to life under a tight deadline was too good to pass up. My wife thought I was nuts — but deep down, I think she knows that’s just part of being a golf course superintendent.

Step one: assess the irrigation. Props to whoever blew out the system in 2014 — seriously. The hardest part was finding the heads in all that overgrowth, but we had no major pipe breaks and about a 65–70% success rate with getting heads to fire and function.

During the shutdown, the bentgrass greens and tees developed an impressive six-inch thatch layer before eventually drying out. We stripped all of it away, including the top few inches of



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sand on the greens. We brought in fresh sand rootzone mix to restore the grade. Bruce Charlton, RTJ's Chief Design Officer and one of the original architects, wanted to "speed up" areas that held water or were prone to winter damage. With 300 inches of average snowfall and heavy spring runoff, that made perfect sense. Greens and tees were seeded with Pure Distinction bentgrass in phases of three or four holes at a time, with all of the front nine seeded by

October 2022. The sand-based greens and tees had gone eight years without any inputs, so we had to revive the rootzone. We brought in 26 pallets of EarthWorks products — blends of 3-3-3, 5-4-5, 1-0-1, and Ecolite—to kickstart things.

When we turned to the fairways, we quickly realized that brush-hogging and overseeding wasn't going to cut it. Rototilling



that much acreage was costly and time-consuming, but it was the right call. Fortunately, a local farmer brought in an 18-foot-wide rototiller and helped us turn over 80+ acres. That allowed us to regrade where needed and get seed down before winter. We dormant-seeded the front nine in the first two weeks of October 2022 — wrapping up just in time, the day before the season's first snow. Fairways and rough were seeded with a bluegrass/rye blend — ryegrass to get a quick pop, and a consistent blend to give us flexibility with mowing lines.

Bruce also wanted to make the course a little more player-friendly. The original layout had long carries and too many creek crossings — two alone on what used to be the 18th hole. That hole was a common complaint, so Bruce took his shot at a redesign. It's now the 16th hole, playable as either a par 4 or par 5, with different tee sets. It's still tough — over 600 yards from the back tees and a 15-yard-wide green — but now there's only one creek crossing, so at least there's that.

In year two, my goals were to get the first nine greens cut at .125", fairways at .625", open nine holes plus the 25,000 sq. ft. social green by September 1, and — optimistically — take one weekend off a month. I hit three out of four. On the construction side, holes 6–12 (formerly 8–14) didn't need major changes — just bunker reshaping and seeding by the end of July. We brought in great compost from Timbercreek Recycling, which we top-dressed onto all seeded fairways and worked into the soil. The spring was brutal — cold temps and snow on June 20th — so the added organics were a huge help.

Our biggest challenges were the 3rd and 16th holes. Both needed major irrigation reroutes and full installs. For the 3rd, we moved and shaped over 25,000 yards of dirt to raise the playing surface by four to five feet in places to protect it from the creeks that become raging rivers each spring.

Continued page 14



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Osprey 2.0

continued from page 13

We just beat the clock again — seeding both holes in mid-October.

2024 brought a mix of excitement and stress as we prepared for the grand reopening. We finally had equipment — and just barely enough people to run it. None of them had worked on a golf course before. I had an insurance adjuster and a retired oil rig engineer as my assistants. My mechanic was a welder who, until 2023, didn't even know reel mowers existed. No one knew how to cut cups. They called themselves the Dirty Dozen. But they worked hard and learned fast.



We met every deadline and ended the season with over 8,500 rounds played — almost 2,000 more than expected.

So, what's next for 2025? Like any course, the work never really ends. But

with two new assistants, a full fleet of mowers, and enough staff to run them, it'll finally feel like a real golf course, again. That said... I did enjoy not having golfers.

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Save Your Trees!

Put a Ring on Them

**Eric George, Maintenance Tech
(Irrigation/Spray Tech)**

Centennial Golf Course, Nampa, Idaho

I've worked in a landscape horticulture-based industry the majority of my life, as a golf course groundskeeper, a lawn care foreman, and a parks department landscape lead/supervisor. I have certifications to teach horticulture and soil as a CTE instructor by the State of Idaho Education Department. I went to school at the University of Idaho for two years for landscape architecture, where I learned about horticulture and design and that I was really bad at drawing. I have an associate's degree from Treasure Valley Community College.

Observations

On a golf course where the main focus is turf, trees and tree maintenance sometimes falls down the priority list. But, based on experience and extensive calculations, I have determined that it takes roughly 30 years to replace the loss of a 30-year-old tree... and it takes six to eight weeks to germinate grass seed. With that knowledge, I think it's safe to say they deserve our time and protection.

I have seen the death of trees that was preventable if we just did one thing... prevent unnecessary damage: root compaction and damage from mowers that try to get too close to reduce trimmer work, or accidentally/unknowingly hitting the trunk with a mower deck or gang unit—which busts the cambium, seriously stunting, breaking, or killing the tree over time. Maybe a tree survives the mower and escapes damage with some fancy footwork. However, after weeks... months... years... of aggressive trimmers knocking down the grass around the base, lines can be created



and eventually girdling the trees of their lifeline of food and water to the canopy.

Solutions

Solutions? Training operators to be more careful. Don't mow so closely. Be gentler with the trimmer. And/or create a barrier to reduce those risks. A ring of protection. A safe space. What does it look like? What do you fill it with? What do different materials

do? How do you fill it? How do you maintain it? Let's dig into the questions.

Creation

Creation of a tree well on a new tree is easy. You have to dig a round hole to plant your tree, hopefully following proper planting procedures. Instructions as outlined by Colorado State University @ https://static.colostate.edu/client-files/csfs/pdfs/TreePlanting_636.pdf. However, on an old or existing tree, I use a string trimmer method to cut a circle around the tree. If you are spatially challenged and are more apt to trim an amoeba or an oval, you can employ a string method. You can find demonstrations on YouTube by searching "How to Create a Perfect Tree Ring."

The size of your ring will vary based on the size and type of tree. In my opinion, there isn't necessarily a wrong answer here. Functionally you can go by a basic understanding that the roots are approximately as wide as the canopy, and our goal is to protect the trunk and the roots. My preference is to grow the tree ring with the canopy until it is 5 to 6 feet from the trunk of the tree. Some considerations are also if there are any extruding roots above the ground level, and if making the ring a little larger could prevent an operator from hitting them with their mower, then we expand the ring. Any damage you can prevent is going to aid in the future health of that tree.

The Hard Part...

Maintaining your tree rings: there are many options for what to do with the ring once it's been created.

Bare Ground

I don't hate this option... but the downside is weeds and grass return. This method is going to require more time in herbicide maintenance. Herbicides on feeder/fine roots, damaged roots, or suckers will damage or even kill the tree. I like this method in most applications for a few reasons. While there is more need to spot spray for grass and broadleaf weeds, you don't have to worry about any mulch getting blown all over, or in the case of a golf course, golfers kicking it out to play their ball. Fewer balls are going to stop in a bare tree ring and are more likely to roll through to the grass where you want them playing. I like this option for trees that are closest to areas of play.

Mulch

So many options. Let's consider a few and what I consider their pros and cons. Pro number one across the board—weed prevention. More weed prevention = less herbicide and weed pulling. There are organic and inorganic options, which also come with some pros and cons.

Organic

Organic mulches are going to feed the soil nutrients as they break down, retain moisture, regulate temperature, and promote a positive habitat to beneficial bugs when maintained properly. Notice I said, when maintained properly. We will circle back to this later. You can purchase these mulches. But I know anywhere I've ever worked, we collect and dispose of tons of leaf and needle debris. Trees are regularly being pruned and wood chips are regularly available. It is a goal of mine to shift the ideology that

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Put a Ring Around It continued from page 16

those materials are waste to be burned or disposed of in a brush pile to utilize those materials in our tree rings. They are natural, they are existing, and they are FREE! They are also biologically the best material for your new and existing trees... as long as they didn't come from a diseased tree. Do dispose of those.

Bark mulch

This is by far my favorite mulch in planter beds. The smell alone is nostalgic of summers at my grandmother's in Kent, Washington, after a warm rain. There are different variations from small chip to large, and even a light shredded version that holds together like a mat. They all break down at different rates. Smaller = faster.

Wood chip mulch

As a solid pro, this material tends to hold up and last longer than bark. Plus, if you do any tree work and have access to a chipper, it can be produced on site and prevent what would otherwise be waste. As previously mentioned, be mindful of using any trees that might have had a disease or pathogen that could spread if used as mulch.

Pine needle mulch

Pine needle mulch breaks down slowly. It produces some naturally occurring pre-emergent compounds (allelopathy) as it breaks down. These reduce the need for herbicide applications for weed and grass maintenance. A negative is that until they get matted down and break down a little, they can be easily displaced. It is recommended to lay it three to five inches thick for optimal weed suppression.

Leaf mulch

This is another readily available resource when you already have trees. The main cons to this are that it looks messy and it is hard to keep in place before it starts breaking down. Then when it does break down, it can mold in large quantities. It is best mixed in with larger options like needles or wood chips that create more air flow.

Inorganic Options

Rocks

Rocks get hot in the summer. They are hell on mower blades... and they will get thrown at high rates of speed. I've witnessed house and vehicle windows shattered by rocks hit with mowers

and trimmers. This ground cover usually has to be purchased. They aren't biologically beneficial like organic options. They will provide some weed suppression. They rarely, if ever, have to be replenished, so they last a long time.

Rubber mulch

They usually have to be purchased. They aren't biologically beneficial like organic options. They can have a tendency to leach harmful chemicals into the soil. They get hot in the summer. They will provide some weed suppression. They rarely if ever have to be replenished so they also last a long time. They look weird, though... so unnatural.

Weed mat

It creates a moisture barrier. It isn't flexible and can girdle the tree over time if it doesn't get cut for relief. It works great for weed suppression for a few years, but they always find a way, eventually. It's ugly, it's hot, and it is not a stand-alone. This is an extra cost that goes under any other option, and it defeats the benefits of any organic option by preventing soil contact and nutrient transfer.

You've chosen a mulch

For best results, it is imperative when putting any mulch around a tree that you avoid volcano mulching. If the material is built up on the trunk of the tree it can promote decomposition. For more information on volcano mulching: *Mulch Volcanoes Are Erupting Everywhere!* <https://extension.psu.edu/mulch-volcanoes-are-erupting-everywhere>. Most mulches need to be three to four inches deep to provide adequate weed suppression.

Conclusion

You are always going to have to do some sort of maintenance around your trees, whether it's trimming or weeding. Why not make it beneficial, functionally and aesthetically pleasing, and make the space that could prevent your trees from damage or worse?



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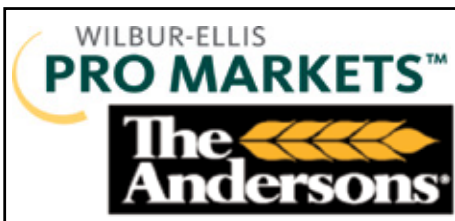
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