

The Best Plants You're Not Using

BY JESSIE ATCHISON

Something's missing from your landscape plantings, and you might not even know it. While the main focus of sports facilities is often on turf, the areas surrounding playing fields are important, too. Flowerbeds make the facility seem special, more colorful, more welcoming, more upscale, and a more pleasant place to spend time. While common plants like impatiens, petunias and geraniums can always be relied upon to provide high-impact color in these settings, there are many more unique plants available that can really set landscape plantings apart. The best part is that an exotic look doesn't have to mean more work for maintenance crews. Here are some exceptional, easy-care plants that you may not be using, but should consider trying.

Foliage

Not all plants need flowers to get attention. Colorful, eye-catching annual foliage is a major trend in horticulture right now. Used as an accent for flower-filled landscape beds or containers or even planted as a focal point, great foliage plants can make a big statement, with the added bonus that "deadheading" is not required.

Altemanthera (*A. dentata*) is a striking foliage plant with a tropical look. Purple Knight is a relatively new variety in this species with deep purple to almost black foliage and an upright, spreading habit. It works well in mixed containers, where the plants will arch dramatically over the edges of the pot, and it's stunning in mass plantings. In landscape beds, each plant grows 16 to 20 in. tall and spreads up to 3 ft., almost forming a shrub of dark leaves. Purple Knight performs well in full sun to light shade; the foliage is darkest in full sun.

Dichondra is a high-impact, long-performance trailing plant that works well in hanging baskets or containers, or even as an attractive annual groundcover. Two varieties, Silver Falls (*D. argentea*) and Emerald Falls (*D. repens*), offer excellent color and texture. Silver Falls is distinguished by rounded, fan-shaped, fuzzy silver foliage on silver stems. It trails or spreads 3 to 4 ft. long in a single season. Emerald Falls has a slightly different, more rounded leaf shape and creates denser, tighter plants. It grows fuller than Silver Falls but not quite as long, trailing about 3 ft. and adding subtle green color to plantings. Both varieties grow about 2 in. tall in landscape beds, forming a lush carpet of foliage, and both are very heat and drought tolerant.



Plant in full sun to partial shade.

Ornamental Millet is a showy, people-pleasing version of an avian favorite; birds love the fluffy seed plumes. Purple Majesty (*Pennisetum glaucum*) is a breeding breakthrough that won the prestigious All-America Selections Gold Medal for its outstanding garden performance. It grows 3 to 5 ft. tall in the landscape, where it makes an excellent backdrop for lower-growing varieties. The plants begin green, but turn a deep mahogany-purple as they mature outside in full sun. To achieve the most impact, plants should still be green and not yet have seed plumes when they are installed. Because Purple Majesty is a hybrid, it will not re-seed in the landscape.

Flowers

Of course, there's nothing quite like a bed of beautiful blooms to spice up a landscape. Angelonia is great for adding height to beds and borders, growing 18 to 24 in. tall. The AngelMist series (*A. angustifolia*) grows tall spires, each covered with small, snapdragon-like blooms. Available in several colors (including shades of deep plum, purple and lavender to white and pink), AngelMist thrives in a wide range of environmental conditions, making it a versatile addition to almost any landscape. Plant in full sun for best results.

Begonias have been popular in landscapes for years, but there's a next generation alternative to the standard, upright fibrous or "wax" begonias commonly plant-



ed. For a truly different and eye-catching look, Dragon Wing and BabyWing begonias (*B. x hybrida*) do the trick in full to partial shade. These "angelwing" types have large, broad leaves and lots of blooms on huge plants. Dragon Wing displays clusters of pendulous blooms in red or pink and grows about 15 in. tall and 18 in. wide. BabyWing is a little more upright, with light pink flowers. These unique varieties are extremely durable, very heat tolerant and perform well in cool conditions, too. And they deliver excellent season-long performance with very low maintenance required.

Dahlias can be challenging to use in the landscape, but the Melody series (*D. hybrida*) has strong, sturdy stems and great garden vigor that make it an excellent bedding or container plant. Large, fully double, long-lasting flowers cover each plant, and the very dark green foliage provides high-impact contrast. Melody varieties come in 6 showy colors, from bright yellow to unique bicolors, like pink and yellow or lavender and white combinations. They grow 18 to 24 in. tall in full sun.

For something really different, try annual gaillardia. The Torch series has excellent heat tolerance. In moderate climates, it will bloom year-round. Each plant is very free flowering, with lots of large blooms. The rich colors available in the series (Yellow, Flame and Red Ember, which is a bold mahogany-red) also make it an ideal choice for autumn displays. In landscapes and containers, Torch gaillardia will reach a height of 14 to 18 in. and spread about 14 to 16 in.

Impatiens are a common sight in many shaded landscape beds, but have you ever tried trailing impatiens? The Fanfare series (*I. hybrida*) is a one-of-a-kind collection; the plants' unique mounding, trailing habit allows them to spread much more vigorously in the landscape than standard impatiens, meaning you'll need to use fewer plants for a lush, flower-filled show. Fanfare varieties fill in extremely fast and are exceptionally heat tolerant, so they look better longer in plantings. Available in Fuchsia, Orange, Lavender or Blush, Fanfare trailing impatiens grow 18 to 20 in. tall and spread about 18 to 24 in.

Lantana is often used in Southern gardens, but plant breeders have infinitely improved these common plants and created varieties that are much better suited to commercial landscape use. For faster fill-in and stronger plant vigor, it's time to abandon the "old guard" and choose varieties that are meant to be landscape lovers. The Landmark series (*L. camara*) was specifically bred for landscapes, with a controlled, mounded habit and vigorous growth. Each plant grows 15 to 20 in. tall and

spreads up to an amazing 2 ft. Free flowering, with an abundance of vibrant, bright blooms in several colors, Landmark lantana is at home in full sun landscapes. While its exceptional heat and drought tolerance make it an easy choice for dry Southern plantings, it also performs well in Northern conditions. **ST**

Jessie Atchison is with Ball Horticultural Company, www.BallLandscape.com.



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Let's talk Internships



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SPORTSTURF asked several veteran turf managers and members of turf academia about sports turf internships. Here are the responses.

(Editor's note: To promote more frank responses, we've identified our panel only by first name and their region of the country.)

What should the goals be of an internship?

Rob from the Midwest: There should be two goals for an internship. The intern should be able to walk away from the experience with additional knowledge and understanding that he/she did not have when they arrived. And the experience has to include both on-the-job work experience as well as management. From the employer side, you want to see a benefit from having a more focused and specialized work force.

Andrew from the Northeast: To gain as much practical experience as possible, and to observe the daily requirements of employment, including the communication skills necessary to excel.

Jason from the West: I think the goal should be to get the intern doing as many different tasks as possible. From painting to running equipment to doing fertilizer calculations. They shouldn't be stuck mowing and string trimming the entire time. The best way to learn is by hands on training.

Kevin from Mid-Atlantic region: 1. That the student knows our number one priority, providing safe, playable fields. 2. The concept of "Plan your work and work your plan." 3. Gain an understanding that the individuals who do this work take a lot of pride in what they do. 4. Gain an understanding that the worst enemy to a field is use but that that's the whole purpose of the field!

Grady from the Southeast: To provide practical knowledge, supplementing a student's academic studies. For some students this will be their first industry-based work experience, others may be more experienced. The internship should be flexible enough to meet the needs of each individual student.

Chris from the Southwest: To experience the practical application of the educational elements that they have studied.

Nick and Bret from the West: 1. To be involved in a genuine working environment where the concepts of sports turf management may be evaluated and recognized as they pertain to the demands of the



athletic world. 2. To become familiar with the relationships that exist between sports turf managers, players, coaches, and organization personnel.

Dan from the Northeast: Interns gain valuable practical experience and the organization benefits by having an employee who has a keen interest in the job he/she is performing.

What can universities and colleges do to increase the value of internships, for everyone involved?

Andrew: Get involved in placing the right student in the right venue.

Jason: An internship could be worth more credits than a normal class.

Kevin: Express and believe the importance that quality athletic facilities play in recruiting students, athletes, and alumni supporters. Add time with Athletic Directors to get their perspectives on the hassles of event cancellations and the feedback they get from the teams that use the fields. This will also help the AD see your side of the coin. Be aware that this is a profession and there's more to it than just cutting grass.

Grady: Provide some oversight/guidance related to the program. Have some interaction with the student's supervisor during the internship experience and at the end.

Chris: Expose as many students to the different practical applications that a college would have, i.e., athletic fields, campus grounds, golf course. Use opportunity for great PR benefit for College depart-

ment and community.

Nick & Bret: Provide a listing of available internships and be able to give insight on what internships would be best for certain students. Provide a set of pre-determined goals and evaluate those goals upon completion of the internship. Perhaps professors could visit interns "in the field" for any further encouragement and support that may be necessary.

Have interns include a presentation upon completion of the internship to other turf students and a professor. Promote communication between the professor, the intern and the employer to ensure that goals are being achieved

Dan: Students should not be eligible for an internship until they have a decent amount of turfgrass education. Classroom education followed by experiences in the field are more beneficial than vice-versa.

Rob: Have some specialized teachings or guest speakers that can shed light onto some of the experiences they may encounter while on their internship. Education of their students with not only the book definitions, but also the understanding of modification and change to adapt to the work environment and the conditions is an important aspect. Try to have them understand that they get out of their experience what they put into it and they need to ask questions.

What skills are interns generally expected to have?

Jason: I think they only need to be able to work with others. If they don't know anything about field work, that's ok because they will learn that.

Kevin: I think a person needs to show all of the following characteristics: hard worker, dedication, leadership, thinker, and most of all, humility. Why? Because none of us have all the answers and you need to be able to make a call for help and not be afraid to try something different or make mistakes and admit it. All of us have been there.

Grady: This is a loaded question. I suggest reasonable people skills and ability to rapidly pick up technical skills.

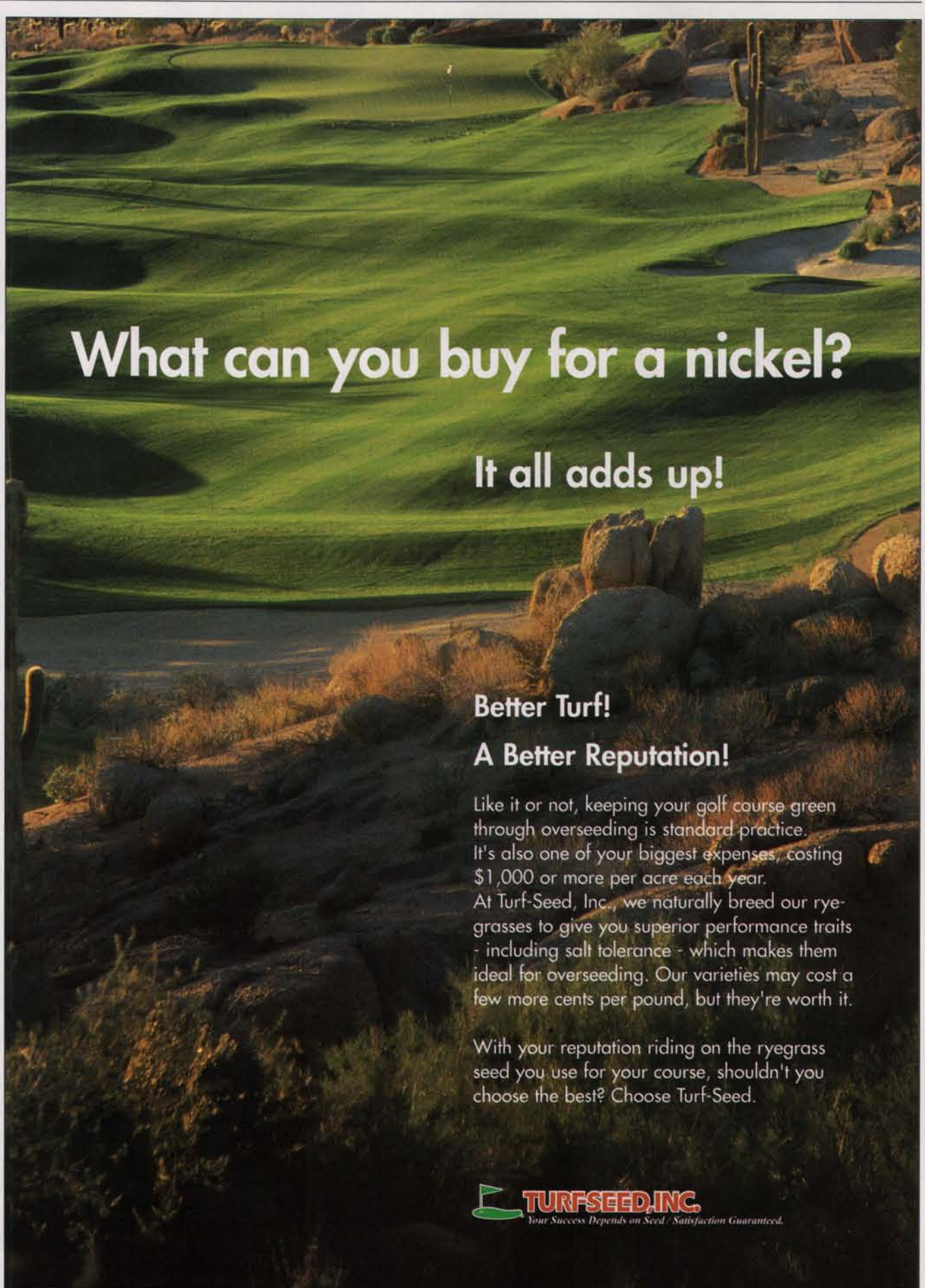
Chris: General knowledge of area of work, ability to listen and learn. Good oral and written communications skills. Ability to work with others.

Nick & Bret: A general knowledge of turf management; a strong desire to learn; the ability to perform daily tasks that may include physical labor, such as mowing, trimming, fertilizing, aerating, and heavy lifting; an interest in sports turf management; and to be able to use past

experiences, if any, and apply them to the internship.

Dan: Interns should have a general knowledge of turfgrass and the willingness to learn how to operate various pieces of equipment. Good old-fashioned common sense can go a long way to making a quality intern.

Rob: Expect them to have a general understanding of some of the potential work load they may be asked to perform. With our industry being one (continued on page 36)




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(continued from page 33) that is always engaged and working with our hands outside, they need to understand the pace of our work and be willing to step in and run with it. We view our interns as management level team members and we expect them to be willing to step up to that level. This is hard for many to grasp as they are only used to doing a regular work load, collecting a check, and going home. We expect them to learn to manage their time and contribute as management would. Since this is a new experience/skill for many of them, this area takes the longest for them to grasp.

Andrew: Enthusiasm, good work ethic, hunger for knowledge.

What's your best advice for aspiring or soon-to-be turf interns?

Kevin: I love what I do. It is very rewarding, but at the same time, very thankless. Meeting or going beyond expectations isn't always enough. You have to be flexible and thick-skinned and take a beating at times, but it only takes one, "Wow that field looks great!" or "This is the best field we play on" to make it all worthwhile.



Grady: Be yourself. Try to pick up as much as you can, keep a daily journal, ask questions when appropriate, seek opportunities to learn, make someone aware of problems as they arise (if they arise), be flexible and open minded.

Chris: Use your internship as an opportunity to network within the profession and area that you would prefer to remain in. Be willing to take risk in your internship and its location.

Nick & Bret: Promote professionalism. Ask questions and learn as much as you can. Be persistent when searching for the right internship for you. Frequently visit with your advisor to get assistance with your internship search. Take pictures. Be open with your employer about your goals.

Dan: Be willing to work hours doing just about anything for very little money and have the time of your life doing it.

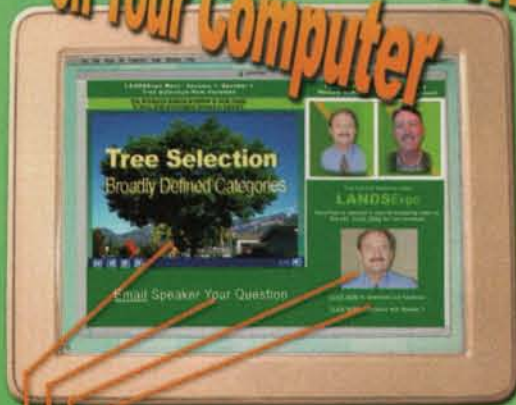
Rob: Look at your experience as if you were a sponge! Soak up as much information as you can during your experience. Not only the skills you would perform in your daily work loads, but also in management. Learning communication, human interaction, motivations, recognition of

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different personalities is something that is very hard to teach in books, but is so very important to your success as a manager. Understand that in this industry you are always learning and there is always ways to improve yourself as well as the people around you.

Andrew: Start early. Get as many potential contacts as possible.

Jason: Try to broaden your resume. If you live in the south, take an internship in the north to get hands on training on cool season grasses. If you live north, go south. If you have only worked football, try baseball. Pick the job that will best help you when it comes time to find a full time job.

How do you solicit interns, or recommend a method for doing so.

Grady: From a university perspective, it helps to e-mail the primary University Turf faculty a job/intern outline. It should detail (minimum) location, wages, basic work expectations, desired starting/ending dates, housing arrangements, benefits, and contact information.

Due to our University calendar and teaching schedules, our students will complete primarily summer internships. If they elect to do an internship that includes a fall or spring semester, they will likely lose one year toward their graduation date. This is unreasonable for most of our students. I should also add that most students will be looking to secure summer internships between November and February before summer. The better students will have secured their internship by Christmas.

Chris: Via internet, professional postings, word of mouth, and college recruitment days.

Nick & Bret: Contact local, regional, national, and/or international colleges that provide turf programs to students. List your internship on the STMA website.

Dan: I prepare a pdf file that I email to certain turf programs that I have a personal relationship with. I have also advertised on the STMA webpage in the past but I would prefer to have interns from my region.

Rob: We have used mass mailers to all university/colleges on the internship program that we offer, participating in career day events at the local level, and posting on the STMA website. We developed an internship brochure that covers some of the basic things they can expect through their experience with us along with a little history of the company. We have also found that once you have developed a good program word of mouth helps in your recruitment.

Andrew: Send a one-page

description of the internship to major turf universities on letterhead.

Housing is a big issue. If you can offer housing, even at a reduced rate, you'll attract higher quality interns.

Jason: We use the STMA website and bulletin board at the conference. But, some would-be turf interns haven't been introduced to STMA yet so I also send job posting to various turf schools around the country. **ST**

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