



## HOW EASY IS IT TO RESTORE HEATHER AND GORSE ON GOLF COURSES?

Dennis Divot gives advice on managing the heathland on the golf course.

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Thinking back to the late fifties, I can recollect many links and heathland courses when an errant shot was severely punished when it finished up in heather. The heather was four to six inches deep, one didn't lose ones ball, but the advice "chip it to the nearest part of the fairway" was sound. Trying to gain distance was a losing gamble, as the club twisted on contact, the face closed, and you were still in "it" perhaps twenty yards further forward. Pulling trolleys over, and increased foot traffic through, the heather has had a severely detrimental effect on its growth. On many courses it no longer flourishes and has lost the physical and mental deterrent character that it used to have. Banning trolleys from going through the heather, with a properly constructed path leading from tee to fairway is the first step to restoring the heather "carry". Marking "trolley no-go areas" between or to the side of fairways is the second.

Golfers have learned through experience that gorse is best avoided. More often than not, a ball played into it will be lost. "One" doesn't walk through it, one walks round! Problems with the gorse arise when the bush is moving towards the end of its useful life. It becomes "leggy" leaving bare ground underneath. It is usually then cut and burned. Establishing new growth to replace the old in the required place can be difficult as natural regeneration occurs by the random spread of seeds by mini-explosions in hot dry weather. The seeds may not fall in the "right" area or germinate there.

It has been my understanding that attempting to transplant both heather and gorse was difficult, with a low plant success rate until this year when I visited BTME at Harrogate. One company was exhibiting their method of re-establishing both species. Both types are grown from seed in special "cell pod" trays. Each cell pod is circular in cross section, about an inch across, and about six inches deep. It contains a peat crumble. Trays contain various numbers of cells but the common one has 40 cell pods per tray. Seed is placed in each pod to germinate. At the end of the first year after germination, the pod contains a healthy plant attached to a fibrous root thimble, which simply pulls out of the container ready for transplanting. In the replanting area, a soil plug the size of the thimble is removed, replaced with a plant and then firmed before the planter moves onto the next. Where heather and gorse once existed naturally, then re-establishment should not present a problem, as the ground pH and conditions should be ideal. Should a newly constructed Course wish to introduce either of these plants in their off-play areas, then specialist advice as to ground suitability should be sought before embarking. It is recommended that the area for re-establishment should be cleared and sprayed to kill all competing vegetation prior to planting. This some Club Members may have difficulty in accepting. The photographic evidence of completed heather and gorse restoration schemes is very impressive, showing first the site,

then it sprayed and planted out, and finally the result after 5 years growth. The planting rate for heather is 6 per square metre. At approximately 25p per plant, the cost for an area 50m long by 10 m wide is £750+ VAT. The gorse plants are more expensive at 36p each but as they are larger plants only 4 are required per square metre: for the same 500 sq.m area the cost would be £720+VAT. 2-year old plants are also available, naturally at a higher price, should a more rapid establishment be required. For environmentally concerned Clubs, it is possible for the seed from their native heather or gorse to be collected and germinated so that the new plant supplied is identical to that already established on the course but this facility has increased cost implications.

This Cell method for developing seedlings works just as well for trees and “reed” type plants, and has now been in use in this country for over 10 years. Most native broad-leaves and coniferous tree varieties are available in this form. Clubs wishing to establish hedges, small copses, or plant individual decorative trees may wish to take advantage of the high success rate of the system. If buying in bulk, prices range from £34 +VAT for alder to £96+ VAT for Copper Beech per 100, with an average price for all tree species about £50+ VAT per 100. Specialist trees such as Yew, Holly and Scottish Elm are also available. It is possible to purchase marram grass for dune stabilisation and other reeds and marginal plants grown by this method, should a club wish to soften the edges of water features.

Further details and full price list may be obtained from “[www.cheviot-trees.co.uk](http://www.cheviot-trees.co.uk)”

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