



*Golf course fairways require continued mowing throughout the fall months to achieve uniform grass heights.*

# GOLF COURSE FAIRWAYS — MANAGING QUALITY AND PLAYABILITY

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Considering all maintained areas of a golf course, fairways on average comprise about [29%](#) of the overall property. Depending on the turfgrass variety and growing environment, under peak growing conditions, fairways can be expensive to maintain, requiring fertilizer, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. Add in water requirements and irrigation costs, fairways are often more expensive to maintain than putting greens given their large size. There are many ways to manage costs by reducing these outlays. One of the biggest costs associated with fairway maintenance is labor expenditures, specifically around mowing frequency.

Fairway turfgrass quality and playing conditions has improved significantly over the years, where a dense, contiguous cushion of turfgrass is desired at a general height of 0.38 to 0.5-inches. Maintaining this height range while the grass is growing requires frequent mowing, sometimes up to three or more times per week.

Mowing frequency depends on environmental growing conditions such as temperature, sunlight duration and intensity, fertility and rainfall. Often, the mowing is to simply level the heights of faster growing grasses to match slower growing areas. Mowing 20 to 30 acres of fairways can easily necessitate between 6 and 10+ labor hours each mowing. In addition to labor costs, fairway mowing costs includes fuel use, mower wear, equipment maintenance and blowing or removal of clippings. In all cases, fairway mowing is timed to minimize potential disruption of golf.

Growth regulators, products that temper the growth rate of turfgrass, have been used for many years to help reduce mowing frequency. Today's growth regulators provide a beneficial mix of significantly reducing mowing frequency by 50 to 75 percent while increasing turfgrass quality. For grasses like bermudagrass and many of the cool-season grasses – e.g., creeping bentgrass – growth regulators applied every 2 to 4 weeks produce a tighter playing surface that better withstands traffic, wear, and shade in addition to decreasing the need to mow.

University research also demonstrates that turfgrass growth regulators can reduce fairway water use by almost 30% and decreases fertilizer requirements and fungicide applications. In fairways susceptible to saturated soils and standing water, growth regulators are useful in prolonging the time between mowing events, which can help avoid damage from mowing through wet areas

While growth regulators are not perfect, they are helpful tools in improving playing conditions, managing growth and saving costs that can be reallocated to other parts of the course.