Agri-Plex® and Lawn-Plex® micronutrients solve your tank mix problems.

Turf management professionals around the world are finding that AGRI-PLEX and LAWN-PLEX are the liquid micronutrients formulated to truly buffer your tank mix to pH 6.0-7.0.

Don't be misled by other claims about pH. Most liquid micronutrients, especially those containing nitrogen, are formulated at a pH of 2.0-3.0 and, at suggested use rates will lower your tank mix to around 3.0-3.5, even when pesticides are added to the tank. Regardless of the water source, these numbers hold true because, practically speaking, water as well as pesticides do not have the ability to resist change in pH. A rare exception is water that is high in bicarbonates.

AGRI-PLEX and LAWN-PLEX provide other benefits since they are fully chelated with a patented organic phosphate-citrate chelate. This means you have full tank mix compatibility and a longer lasting greenup response without phototoxicity. Micronutrients containing nitrogen are, at best, only partially chelated and may cause compatibility problems.

AGRI-PLEX and LAWN-PLEX are the micronutrients golf course superintendents and lawn care operators are using. They eliminate problems and provide enhanced results. Now, isn't that a relaxing thought?

Do you want the FACTS on pH and micronutrients? See your local RGB Distributor or call us toll free 1-800-879-4766.

Stop by booth #3065-3067 in New Orleans at the GCSAA Show
Are rebuilds necessary?—Once a year or sometimes more often, you can do a ‘power tune-up,’ Radcliff advises. This consists of simply removing the cylinder heads, cleaning out carbon, and making all the basic adjustments to make sure the engine is performing at its maximum. A lot of rebuilds can be saved by simple, basic maintenance.

Let the pros do it—"I don't see any reason for an untrained person to do any more than remove the cylinder head of an engine," says Radcliff. "Taking a sump or side cover off to look inside of the engine will usually bring more trouble than good. Engines are becoming more and more complex as time goes on. Things that even dealers have to refer to manuals about certainly shouldn't be in the hands of someone who hasn't even read the manual. You need the understanding of the physics of an engine."

Use the specified oil—"I cannot stress it enough," Radcliff says. "(Briggs & Stratton) changed oil recommendations to a straight 30-weight as opposed to multi-viscosity oil; typically you'll get much better oil consumption numbers than you do with multi-viscosity oils. They don't burn nearly as much. With emission controls and trying to make the engine last as long as possible, we want to make sure we use the right oil and change it at frequent intervals.

Radcliff calls wrong oil or bad oil, "Probably the number one cause of engine death."

—Terry McIver

Calculating mowing costs

Don't forget to add in your desired profit margin when calculating what to charge the customer!

Figuring out how much it costs to mow a given area is not entirely dependent on the area’s size, says Howard Mees of Environmental Care Inc., San Diego, Calif.

The service provider must also take into account site considerations, as well as equipment and labor costs.

Site considerations include things like areas that are too wet or over-fertilized; small, tight locations with a lot of detail; and so on. "Picking the right piece of equipment to get optimum performance in a given location will affect production," Mees explains. "If a 21-inch mower is used on a five-acre park, the cost per acre of cutting can be quite high."

Here is the procedure Mees uses to calculate his mowing costs per property.

Equipment costs—No matter what kind of mower you choose to use for particular projects, you are still faced with the initial purchase cost of the machine. And once you've made the purchase, you must spend money to maintain that piece of equipment.

"There are not only the standard expenses of gas, oil and rubber goods, but also your preventive maintenance functions, as well as your shop time expense," notes Mees. "You also have parts, labor and downtime expense when your equipment is in for repairs."

There are also some hidden costs that you might not be figuring, says Mees. These might include:

- transporting the equipment to and from the job site;
- loading and unloading;
- time during the shift the equipment is not in use; and/or
- cost of back-up equipment.

"The above considerations have a dollar value that you can attach to them," Mees says. "You can then see how many hours you actually are operating the machine and this will give you an equipment cost per hour to own and operate that machine."

Some average costs of operation—as provided by experience, conversations with other contractors Mees talked to, and input from manufacturers—are:

- gas and oil ........................................... 54 cents/hr.
- repair ..................................................... 46 cents/hr.
- cost of purchase ..................................... 55 cents/hr.
- vehicle operation ................................. 13 cents/hr.

"The average cost per hour, not allowing for the size of the equipment, is about $2.61 without profit and overhead," notes Mees.

Operator costs—Next, you figure out how much you are paying the operator per hour, including downtime and benefits.

A formula for calculating this number can be found in the June, 1991 issue of this magazine, on pages 32-33. Typically, total operator costs run about 31 percent over base hourly wages. This figure includes statutory costs like FICA and worker's comp, and voluntary costs like insurance, retirement and uniforms.

Add together equipment costs and labor costs per hour and you get the cost per hour of mowing a particular area.

This, of course, is not what you charge.

Other costs—The average overhead, which comes from a study done by the Associated Landscape Contractors of
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profile balanced design. Advanced
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### CALCULATING MOWING COSTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Your worksheet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sq. ft. to be mowed this property</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Production rate (sq. ft. per hr.)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Hrs. of production this property (Line 1 divided by Line 2)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Cost of equipment purchase</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Expected equipment life (yrs.)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Hrs. mowed per yr.&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Equipment life in hrs. (Line 5 times Line 6)</td>
<td>4,680</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Equipment cost per hr. (Line 4 divided by Line 7)</td>
<td>$2.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Gas and oil cost per hr.&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$0.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Repair costs per hr.&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Total equipment cost per hr. (Add Lines 8,9,10)</td>
<td>$3.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Labor cost per hr.&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$11.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Operating costs per hr. (Add Lines 11,12)</td>
<td>$14.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Overhead per hr. (Line 13 times 0.31&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>$4.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Total operating costs per hr. (Add Lines 13,14)</td>
<td>$18.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Profit % desires&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Profit per hr. (Line 15 times Line 16)</td>
<td>$3.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Selling price per hr. (Add Lines 15,17)</td>
<td>$22.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Total selling price this property (Line 3 times Line 18)</td>
<td>$41.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>SELLING PRICE THIS PROPERTY PER SQ. FT. (Line 19 divided by Line 2)</td>
<td>$0.00069</td>
<td>or 0.07 cents/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Footnotes
- <sup>a</sup> from accompanying chart
- <sup>b</sup> based on 30 hrs. actual production per week
- <sup>c</sup> Howard Mees/Environmental Care research
- <sup>d</sup> approximation: see LM June, 1991 issue (approximate hourly wage + 31%)
- <sup>e</sup> 0.31 is average based on Associated Landscape Contractors of America survey
- <sup>f</sup> arbitrary: put your profit margin here

America a few years back, is 31 percent over and above this figure. Then, add to this the profit margin you would like to see and you come up with a selling price.

"Taking these numbers further and using an $8 per hour labor rate (including downtime and benefits), the cost to mow an average area per square foot is $0.00069 (or 7/10ths of a cent)," notes Mees.

"To come up with some more meaningful numbers," he continues. "I looked at various data to arrive at a more complete number. This included mowing, detail work, clean-up, irrigation checks and fertilization.

"The range was .013 cents per square foot for larger, easy areas to a high of .049 cents per square foot for tougher, detail-oriented sites. The average for the numbers I ran was .031 cents per square foot for turf areas needing the complete service."

Mees makes one final point: in-field conditions are infinitely more valuable than these overall averages when making true calculations of what it costs to mow.
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Chapter 2
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TURFTOWN TIPS

1. Choose the right grass species for your area.
2. Properly prepare the site for planting.
3. Follow recommended planting rates.
4. Water the new turf regularly.
5. Fertilize according to a professional's advice.

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Circle No. 201 on Reader Inquiry Card
Spring annuals for the landscape

Improved annuals have more color, uniformity and disease resistance. Your biggest concern is proper plant selection.

by Dr. Lois Berg Stack, extension specialist, University of Maine

In the past 40 years, since the introduction of F1 hybrids revolutionized the bedding plant industry, thousands of improved annual flowers have been introduced. Each year, annuals offer more color, greater uniformity, increased disease resistance, enhanced durability, improved growth habit and better garden performance.

The first step in creating effective and productive annual flower gardens is good plant selection. Whether you are looking for old reliables or new introductions, you can narrow the options by following these few simple rules:

1. Match the plants to the environment. There are flowers for every location, wet or dry, sunny or shady—but there is no single annual that will adapt to every environment.

2. Choose plants that look good all season. Some annuals stop flowering in the heat of midsummer. Others are naturally short-lived. Annuals vary by species (petunias vs. marigolds, for example), but cultivars within a single species also vary ('Apricot Brandy' vs. 'Red Fox' celosia, for example). Where can you see annuals in real-life situations, in order to assess which ones will perform best? Visit public gardens, check out university and commercial trial gardens, ask other landscape professionals ask the greenhouse growers. (Table 1 lists some annuals that adapt well and perform in a variety of environments, and under a broad range of cultural management levels.)

3. Select low-maintenance annuals. "Low-maintenance" is a relative term when applied to annual bedding plants, since the process of planting each year is a high-maintenance task.

"Low maintenance annuals" do not require frequent pesticide application, deadheading (removal of old flowers to promote development of new ones) or other time-consuming procedures.

Don't skimp on quality—Evaluate plant quality by looking for good green color, lack of insect and disease problems, good flower bud count (in flowering annuals), healthy root systems, thriftiness and uniformity. When any of these traits are missing, you may not be able to tell exactly what went wrong, but you know that one or more stresses were at work. A stressed plant will never achieve its full potential, and if you can't tell what the stress was, it

The silver-leafed “Dusty Miller” requires full sun, but little maintenance.

The Zinnia elegans. Zinnias can be seeded directly into gardens after frost.
will be difficult to compensate for it after the plants are in the landscape.

Growers who produce high quality plants can provide an extra service: they can recommend colorful, high performance, low maintenance annuals for specific sites. They can even give you a projected maintenance schedule. Take advantage of the grower’s knowledge resource.

The lowest-priced annuals are not always the best buy. Consider the relationship among quality, price and value. A high-quality bedding plant is worth more than a low quality one, because it will perform better. A high-quality plant requires more input (control of the production environment, pest management, proper fertilizer application, etc.), and hence may legitimately cost more money. But if that investment of additional cents per plant pays off in higher performance in the landscape, then the investment is a good one.

**Planting tips**—Here are some tips for planting annuals in the spring:

- Pinch back leggy seedlings at planting time. Petunias often become a bit leggy in the greenhouse. If pinched back at planting time, they may take a bit longer to flower, but they will branch more and give more color in the long run.

- If you apply a pre-emergence herbicide before planting a flower bed, rototill and rake out the bed, apply the granules and rake in lightly. Plant the young seedlings through the layer of soil containing herbicide granules, making sure the root ball penetrates slightly below the herbicide layer. Many transplants suffer root damage when new roots grow into the soil layer containing herbicide granules.

- When planting annual seedlings, remove plants from their containers even if the containers are peat or fiber. Until these degradable pots break down, they restrict young root growth. Be sure to cover the entire root ball with soil, particularly if the plants were grown in a peat-lite mix. These soiles mix dry out more quickly than the surrounding native soil. Leaving the top of the root balls exposed at soil surface will dry out and stress young plants.

- For better root development, allow young annuals to become established for a few weeks before mulching. Do not apply mulches in the spring, as they cool the soil, which inhibits rapid plant development. Allow the seedlings to develop for a few weeks, then weed, water and mulch.

- Some annuals can be sown directly in the flower bed with excellent results.

  **Sweet alyssum**, a low-growing edging plant, can be seeded directly into the garden in early spring, and will provide good color all season. **Moss rose**, another edging plant, develops very quickly from seed. Sow the seed after frost danger has passed.

  **Dwarf French marigolds** can be seeded directly into the garden, producing flowers in 8 to 10 weeks. **Zinnia** seedlings often become quite leggy in the spring greenhouse, but when they develop quickly in the heat of summer, they are much stockier. A strong, well-branched, healthy crop of zinnias can be grown by seeding directly into the garden after all danger of frost.

  —Dr. Lois Berg Stack is an extension specialist in ornamental horticulture at the University of Maine.

---

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20 HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPRING ANNUALS FOR 1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full sun (Require minimal maintenance)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canna x generalis (&quot;Canna&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catharanthus roseus (&quot;Periwinkle&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closme hasslerana (&quot;Spider Flower&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvssodia tenuloba (&quot;Dahiberg Daisy&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaillardia pulchella (&quot;Annual Blanket Flower&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petunia x hybrida (&quot;Petunia&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvia farinacea (&quot;Mealycup Sage&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanvitilla procumbens (&quot;Creeping Zinnia&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senecio cineraria (&quot;Dusty Miller&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinnia angustifolia (&quot;Narrow-leaved Zinnia&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Novelty plants (Have a unique appearance)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capsicum annum (&quot;Ornamental Pepper&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocimum basilicum (&quot;Sweet Basil&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelargonium species (&quot;Scented Geraniums&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvia viridis (no common name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbena x hybrida (&quot;Verbena&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shade plants (These annuals complement impatiens gardens)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begonia x sempertores-cultorum (&quot;Wax Begonia&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begonia x tuberhybrida (&quot;Tuberous Begonia&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobularia x martilma (&quot;Sweet Alyssum&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicotiana alata (&quot;Flowering Tobacco&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola x wittrockiana (&quot;Pansy&quot;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **High performance** (Require minimal maintenance)

Tropical Rose, 3 feet tall; grow from seed
'Cooler series and 'Pretty in Rose' 1.5 to 2-feet
White, pink, lavender; 4 feet
Free-flowering yellow daisy; 6 to 8 feet
'Red Plume' needs deadheading
Multiflora types best for mass planting
'Victoria' is 24 feet tall; vibrant blue flowers
Drought-tolerant; 8-inch spread
All of the silver-leaved variety are excellent
'White Star' the talk of 1991 trials

---

**CONSIDER SOIL QUALITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temperature</th>
<th>Moisture levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Nutrient levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drainage</td>
<td>pH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONSIDER TEMPERATURE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily fluctuation</th>
<th>Spring and fall frost dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to temperature-altering objects such as buildings or bodies of water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light intensity, day length and reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precipitation: amount and regularity throughout the growing season</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind and weed problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Source: Dr. Lois Berg Stack
Finally, A High Capacity Mower Doesn’t Handle

For too long, high-capacity mowers have left a lot to be desired. But now all that has changed. Presenting the revolutionary new Groundsmaster® 580-D with an 80 hp turbo-diesel engine. The first large-scale rotary mower that combines the productivity of a 16-foot machine with the handling ease of a smaller mower.

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This Week, Set Aside 4 Hours And Tee It Up

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