



Keeping up with rough mowing can sometimes result in scalping and may consume many labor hours each week.

ROUGHS—MAKING THE CUT

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As more golf courses are experiencing cuts in staffing and budgets, I am getting requests for help and ideas on ways to maintain and operate a golf course with a reduced maintenance budget. Roughs account for the greatest percentage of maintained acreage of most golf courses and are a good place to look for savings.

Here are a few important considerations if you are looking to reduce rough maintenance costs at your course:

Mowing – One of the greatest costs on a golf course is labor and there is a high number of labor hours allocated to mowing roughs. The improving weather and growing conditions mean that bermudagrass, zoysiagrass and seashore paspalum will soon be at peak growth. Rough mowing can take one person five workdays to complete depending on the acreage involved. Accounting for fuel, equipment costs, maintenance, and labor, rough mowing can cost more than \$2,500 every month with one fully staffed

position. Plant growth regulators (PGRs) can help reduce growth and mowing frequency, but we must consider the cost of the product and the labor required to spray many acres of rough. Unfortunately, the cost of applying plant growth regulators in the rough often negates the cost savings of reduced mowing. Additionally, a common issue with growth regulators like trinexapac-ethyl is that although the grass stops growing; weeds don't. Trinexapac-ethyl labels also caution against the use of herbicides as a tank mix with the growth regulator.



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Weed Control – Herbicides can be even more expensive than PGRs. Many golf courses attempt to save money by spot spraying herbicide mixtures for emerged, problematic weeds that are not successfully controlled by spring or fall preemergence herbicide applications. Spot spraying can consume significant staff time, which translates to high costs. On some golf courses, there is one person dedicated entirely to daily scouting and spot spraying of weeds in season. While the total cost of the herbicide decreases with this approach, the labor cost is higher than it would be for boom spraying because treating small areas selectively often requires much more time.

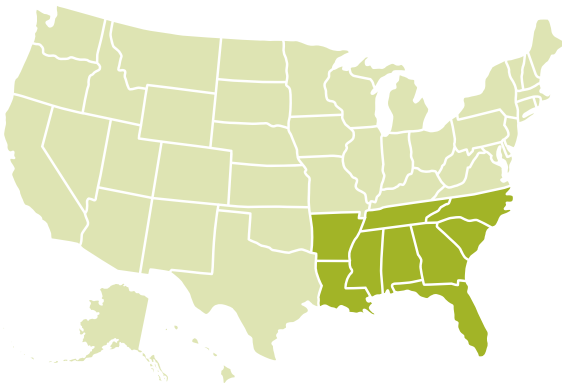
MSMA herbicide, though no longer labeled for use in Florida, is labelled in other states. While effective and inexpensive, MSMA may require up to four applications at seven- to 10-day intervals to achieve weed control. It can also cause temporary turf discoloration or yellowing. However, its low cost and effectiveness often outweigh this concern. Unlike trinexapac-ethyl, MSMA controls many weeds but doesn't help to reduce mowing.

Some other economical herbicides that don't get a lot of promotion but may be good to consider are atrazine, dicamba, metribuzin and simazine. There may be restrictions with when these can be used, so read the labels carefully. As is the case with many herbicides, there is always the potential for some temporary discoloration when using these products. With a closed golf course, reduced rounds, or simply a reduced budget and maintenance crew, these forgotten herbicides may be more attractive than normal with a cost around \$15 an acre or less.

Mowing Reduction With Weed Suppression – An older herbicide labeled for golf course use that has PGR benefits at reduced rates is imazapic. It is a Class-D turfgrass PGR that may also provide some weed growth suppression. Like MSMA, it can cause some temporary discoloration, but imazapic can also provide better cost savings with a price less than a few dollars per acre with fewer broadcast applications. This product provides growth regulation of bermudagrass and some weeds, such as nutsedge and kyllinga, and reduced mowing frequencies.

As is always advised when trying any new product, read the label for details and restrictions and test the product before applying to large areas. Avoid tank mixes when testing products to fully understand their performance. Don't let the low cost of a product deceive you when deciding upon a rate. More is not

necessarily better and applying at too high of a rate may equate to unacceptable damage. Start low and work your way up in rate when testing, always staying within label rates and restrictions. As always, if the USGA Green Section can help, please reach out to your [regional USGA agronomist](#).



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