



Of all the costs associated with turf maintenance, mowing is usually the most costly.

Mowing costs may be cut by using larger mowers. However, that's not always practical. Mowing less frequently will reduce costs, but turf quality will suffer. Less expensive equipment will not last as long.

There is a way to cut costs, reduce the wear and tear on mowing equipment, do a good turn for the environment and raise the turf's quality. It's by using a plant growth regulator (PGR).

GTE Telephone Operations World Headquarters is located on a well-landscaped, meticulously maintained, 112-acre campus in Irving, Texas. To maintain the high quality of the landscape, GTE landscape managers had originally decided to bag clippings and take them to a local composting operation.

However, the GTE staff knew that their best option was to simply leave the clippings on the turf where they would decompose naturally, recycling valuable nutrients and returning organic matter to the soil. The 28 acres of turf consist of

about 75 percent common bermudagrass and 25 percent hybrid bermuda.

"I certainly was skeptical of a PGR's ability to pay for itself," says John Bolte, GTE's landscape coordinator.

During 1994, a 4.5-acre area was selected as a test site for Primo, a PGR formulated by Ciba. Growth declined markedly only five days after the first Primo application; after seven days, the turf was darker green. It was also noticeably thicker, another major benefit of Primo in areas where common and hybrid bermudas grow side-by-side.

"The two varieties are very different, yet in many locations, they're right next to each other," says Bolte. "We've always faced the challenge of trying to match the common and the hybrid. But we've never had them blend so well.

"Our 28 turf acres are also not flat. We saw quite a bit of scalping and gouging before the application. The PGR minimized that problem."

Bolte used Primo on the entire property in 1995. The site was fertilized five times during the season with a 21-7-14 (30% Nutralene) at a rate of 1.5 lbs./N/1000 sq. ft. It was also applied five times during the year: hybrid bermuda received 1 pint/acre and common bermuda received 1 quart/acre. Weekly mowing reports indicated that 16,885 bags of grass clippings—about 2000 cu. yds.—of lawn waste were removed in 1994, but just 2393 bags were removed in 1995, an 86 percent reduction.

"We were able to offer a lower price per cut by using Primo," says Lewis Metheny Jr. of Metheny Commercial Lawn Maintenance. "Our crew was able to mow, edge and detail the property much faster, too."

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Mowing or PGRs: which saves money?

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