

Tips from the front lines on how to save money

Editor's note: We asked STMA member turf managers for some tips on saving money in maintenance practices. Here are the responses we received:

RICH WATSON Grounds Supervisor/ Middle School Foreman Pine Hill (NJ) Public Schools

Every penny counts, so goes the saying. Over the past few years that statement more has really rung true. There have been a few money saving moves that we have made here in Pine Hill. School districts have a lot of weekend activities going on regularly. Most of the activity occurs on Saturday for us. About 10 years ago we hired a Tuesday-through-Saturday groundskeeper that covers many of those events. Sometimes for larger events we still need to bring others in for overtime but the bulk of the events are covered by the overlap shift. It also allows us to get some mowing tasks around the buildings done that are difficult to do while school is in session. Nothing is a perfect solution, but it has saved some money previously spent on overtime.

Another money saving option is to enter a shared service agreement with your local municipality or school district. In our case, we provide field maintenance such as fertilizer/pesticide applications, aeration, seeding and infield maintenance for our town facilities and in return they help us out with leaf removal and use of larger equipment. These sound like small things but over time they add up.

DAN BERGSTROM Director, Major League Field Operations Houston Astros

It is wise to shop around and get multiple bids for purchases. Negotiate lower prices using all bids as leverage if necessary. Another idea regarding soil and tissue tests: Knowing exactly what nutrients are available in the soil and present in the plants can save money or redirect dollars to the needed nutrients. Your end result is stronger turf, which starts an entirely new cycle of saving money.

GREG BURGESS Head Groundskeeper Greenville Drive

We will spray a PGR once we are about 90% Bermuda to help reduce clippings. This cuts our costs as we are mowing just about every day either way during the ball season.

Probably the main way I reduce costs is borrowing equipment that I would normally rent or pay for someone to perform the practice. For example, I have a couple good friends that are local golf superintendents at some pretty nice courses, which means they have a lot of equipment. I have a great rapport with these guys. Our saying is "Mi casa es su casa" (My house is your house). My favorite piece of equipment is a walking aerifier that I can use often on all my tight and more sensitive areas like my infield and foul territory, where the golf course is only using this particular unit once a year to aerify tees. Also, I reduce rental costs for several other pieces of equipment, like sod cutters, box blades, sod layers, dump trailers, etc.

RYAN WOODLEY Head Groundskeeper Trenton Thunder

When I arrived in Trenton this season I inherited a trade deal with Jacobsen that allows me to have access to an aerator and core sweeper up to five times a season. Along with that I can demo almost any equipment I want for a few weeks. In return Jacobsen gets a field day and a suite for a game. Since the stadium is owned by Mercer County, it allows me to get my equipment tuned up and reels sharpened during the season.

CJ LAUER Director of Grounds McDonogh School (MD)

We have 850 acres that I am responsible to maintain. Cutting maintenance costs and man hours is always a factor. We employ a lot of the tried and true methods such as using PGRs in our liquid fertilizer applications; we also use poly-coated fertilizers that give us a long, slow release through the season, and we have created no-mow and naturalized areas to cut down on our mowing of less trafficked areas around campus.

MATT ANDERSON, CSFM Sports Turf Project Manager University of Arizona

I've saved dollars in the past by making some of my own tools. Main examples are: chalk stencil for batter's boxes, topdressing brush (old broom heads and some plywood), various nail drags and my own mound gauge.

MICHAEL HOPKINS Agriculture Instructor Louisa County (VA) High School

I am in a different role from most turf grass managers since I teach Turf Grass Science and have my students help take care of the athletic fields on the high school campus. So what I can give you is this: That by having a student crew, plus my knowledge and expertise as a turf instructor, our school system saves a lot of money on labor plus has some of the best maintained fields in the district.

It's also a win-win from the standpoint that my students gain a lot of real life, hands-on skills through their participation in class. We also have a great working relationship with Parks & Rec and the schools maintenance department by sharing equipment and resources. So, in short, a partnership between the Turf Science program, Parks and Rec and the maintenance department can save everyone involved money while benefiting each group in other ways also.

BRANT WILLIAMS Manager of Athletic Facilities Dallas Baptist University

Three things that we have done here at DBU to keep cost low is first, lease our reel mowers and Gators from John Deere Austin Turf and Tractor. This has help reduce maintenance cost of equipment, keep us under a warranty, and we can always count on new mowers every few years. Working with your mower supplier they can fully customize a lease to fit your budget.

Secondly, we have made investments in our own topdresser and core cultivation equipment whereas we use to subcontract these services out. Last, we use equipment rental companies to the best of our abilities by only renting equipment for the days we will need the equipment and not by the week if at all possible, based on the job. ■