

A Safer Lawn Micronutrient Guide

Using expired iron and zinc supplement tablets in a hose-end sprayer

THE SHORT ANSWER

Iron may be tested cautiously; zinc should be omitted unless a recent soil or tissue test confirms deficiency. Human supplement tablets are not registered fertilizer products. Their binders do not fully dissolve, the zinc chemical form is unspecified, and performance cannot be guaranteed. The preferred choice is a labeled liquid turf iron product.

Working assumptions

This guide applies only if each iron tablet declares **65 mg elemental iron from ferrous sulfate** and each zinc tablet declares **50 mg elemental zinc**. It assumes an established lawn, not seedlings, and a calibrated application area of **1,000 square feet**. Vegetable cellulose and dicalcium phosphate are treated as inactive tablet material, not as useful fertilizer nutrients.

Path	Tablets per 1,000 sq ft	Element delivered	When appropriate
Default test: iron only	84 iron tablets No zinc tablets	5.46 g Fe (0.012 lb)	Patchy chlorosis or confirmed iron need; cool, actively growing turf
Zinc add-on	27 zinc tablets in a separate application	1.35 g Zn (0.003 lb)	Only after a lab recommendation or local Extension confirmation

Why 84 iron tablets? $84 \times 65 \text{ mg} = 5,460 \text{ mg}$ elemental Fe, matching the low end of NDSU Extension's foliar range of 0.012-0.024 lb actual Fe per 1,000 sq ft. This is more conservative than common product-based ferrous sulfate recommendations.

Important: this is not a complete lawn fertilizer

These tablets supply micronutrients only. They provide no meaningful nitrogen or potassium and should not be represented as an N-P-K fertilizer. Iron can improve color temporarily, but it does not correct nitrogen deficiency or underlying problems such as compaction, poor drainage, disease, or incorrect pH.

Iron-only concentrate: 1,000 sq ft batch

INGREDIENTS

84 iron tablets (65 mg elemental iron each)

Warm water: enough to extract and then fill the hose-end reservoir as described below

Do not add: herbicide, pesticide, bleach, vinegar, soap, ammonia, or another fertilizer.

- 1. Calibrate with clean water.** Mark 1,000 sq ft (20 x 50 ft). Determine how much finished spray your hose-end device applies while you cover it evenly. Target **3-5 gallons of finished spray** over the area. Follow the sprayer manual; dial markings vary.
- 2. Make an extract.** Wearing gloves and eye protection, crush 84 tablets in a dedicated, labeled container. Stir into about 1 quart of warm water. Let stand 20-30 minutes, stirring several times.
- 3. Filter twice.** Pass the mixture through a fine reusable paint filter or several layers of cloth. Filter again. Discard the retained cellulose/phosphate solids in household trash. **Do not pour sediment into the sprayer.** Even after filtering, clogging remains possible.
- 4. Load for exactly 1,000 sq ft.** Put all filtered liquid into the hose-end reservoir. Add water only as needed for the reservoir and the calibrated sprayer setting. The **entire nutrient batch** must be distributed evenly over 1,000 sq ft; dilution changes spray volume, not dose.
- 5. Patch-test first.** Treat only 100 sq ft using one-tenth of the batch (8 tablets gives 520 mg Fe; 9 gives 585 mg). Wait 48-72 hours. Stop if blades darken to black, curl, or scorch.
- 6. Apply.** Use parallel passes with minimal overlap on dry turf during a cool part of the day. Keep spray off pavement, walls, fences, vehicles, stone, and pools. Do not apply if rain is imminent. Follow the locally appropriate post-application watering advice; Extension guidance differs by climate.

FREQUENCY

Do not schedule automatic repeat treatments. Reassess after 2-4 weeks. If the test produced an improvement without injury and a continuing iron need is plausible, repeat no sooner than every 2-4 weeks during active growth. Stop after two applications unless a soil/tissue test or local Extension professional supports continued use.

Zinc: conditional, separate, and one-time

Do not combine zinc with the first iron treatment. If a current soil/tissue report specifically calls for zinc, apply a separate patch test first. The conservative whole-area cap in this guide is **27 zinc tablets per 1,000 sq ft** (1.35 g elemental Zn), applied once. Prepare, double-filter, calibrate, and distribute it using the same method. Do not repeat without a new lab recommendation. If the zinc source on the Supplement Facts panel is not stated, do not use it on turf.

Warnings and stop conditions

- **Use a soil or tissue test.** Zinc deficiency is rare in turf; zinc excess/toxicity is more common. Soil pH strongly affects micronutrient availability.
- **Do not use moldy, wet, contaminated, coated, gummy, or badly degraded tablets.** Expiration means potency and physical behavior are no longer assured.
- **Keep away from children, pets, food crops, wells, drains, ponds, streams, and stormwater.** Prevent runoff. Do not allow people or animals onto treated turf until the foliage is dry.
- **Iron stains.** Protect concrete, masonry, paint, siding, clothing, and equipment. Rinse accidental splashes immediately before they dry.
- **Burn risk.** Do not treat wet, drought-stressed, dormant, newly seeded, diseased, or heat-stressed turf. Avoid overlap. Never exceed the area-based dose because the reservoir still contains liquid.
- **Sprayer compatibility.** Cellulose and dicalcium phosphate can settle and clog. Use a dedicated sprayer, maintain agitation, stop if flow changes, and rinse equipment over the treated lawn - never into a drain.
- **Local rules control.** Check state/local fertilizer restrictions, wellhead setbacks, and water-protection rules. This guide is educational, not a product label or site-specific agronomic prescription.

WHEN THE BEST ANSWER IS DISPOSAL

If there is no confirmed micronutrient need, use a medicine/supplement take-back option if accepted locally, or follow current household disposal instructions. EPA advises against flushing or pouring unwanted supplements down a drain.

Sources and basis

[NDSU Extension, "Interpreting the NDSU Soil Test Analysis for Managing Turfgrass"](#)

[University of Georgia Extension, "Turfgrass Fertility: Understanding Fertilizer Labels, Macronutrients, and Micronutrients"](#)

[Montana State University Extension, "Calibrating Home and Garden Sprayers"](#)

[U.S. EPA, "Household Medication Disposal"](#)

[Virginia Tech, "Urban Nutrient Management Handbook"](#)

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