

MAINTENANCE

Free food

Educating clients about the benefits of leaving lawn clippings is an obstacle.

By STEVE THOMAS

Mike Maddrell, owner of Echelon Landscape Maintenance, Dublin, Ohio, knows the favorable attributes and science behind allowing leaves and clippings to decompose naturally on lawns. Maddrell studied turf management at The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute, Wooster, Ohio.

But he also knows his customers. "I've tried in the past to explain the benefits of leaving some residue on the lawn, but most people I've taken care of prefer clippings and leaves be removed completely," he says. "I prefer to not bag clippings, as they're good free food for the lawn."

Echelon employees typically cut once and leave the clippings, double mulching only when lawns are unusually long, due to springtime growing conditions. Clumps or clippings are then bagged or crews use a blower to disperse the excess residue.

Kyle Cooper, CEO of Property Masters in Marietta, Ga., understands that some customers always will prefer having their clippings removed. "We currently mulch the majority of our properties, unless customers request them to be bagged," he says. "When bagging, we calculate that cost and figure the charges by square feet and bill accordingly."

After collection, grass clippings are taken to Property Masters' facilities to begin the composting cycle, along with hedge

PHOTO: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

PVB LOCK BOX

PVB LOCK BOX

The **P.V.B LOCK BOX** will come in one size 24x24x12 this will fit all wall mounted Pressure Vacuum Breaker units ranging from 3/4" to 2 1/2" as you may have seen at the 2012 irrigation show this product is professionally built in the U.S.A. The product is powder coated hunter green, it comes with the four security bolts and lead anchors it also comes with one security key unlocking bit. This unit wholesales for \$319.99 and the manufactures suggested retail price is \$499.00. Our contractors are installing these units at \$600.00 each and the unit installs in less than 20 minutes.



CLOCK BOX

The **CLOCKBOX** will come in one size 14x17x10 this will fit most outdoor irrigation controllers, this unit will also be powder coated hunter green and come with a removable front cover for access to the unit the locking mechanism will be (2) security hex pin locking bolts and will come with two unlocking bits one for the owner and one for the irrigation or maintenance tech. This unit wholesales at \$259.99 and the MSRP is \$439.00. Our contractors installed pricing is \$539.00 and this also installs in less than 20 minutes. By installing this product this assures that no unauthorized person or persons are tampering with the irrigation controller and will also protect it from being stolen.



Call 800.372.1434 To Place Your Order Or Visit Us At www.pvblockbox.com

trimmings, leaves and other debris. The materials are then taken by Dumpster-load to composting sites, where they're recycled into mulch and topsoil.

Because "grasscycling" (allowing clippings to decompose on site) is the most efficient and least expensive method of handling clippings, educating customers is the real challenge, says Andrew Gembecki, co-founder of Natural Greenscapes Inc., Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

"We're starting to find customers trending to a more natural approach," he says. "We do a lot more mulching on properties and try to convert the non-believers," he says.

When properties are not mulched, Natural Greenscapes' employees blow yard waste into a pile and vacuum clippings.

"At that point our costs go up," he says. "Dumping fees, the costs of operating additional equipment and added labor costs all contribute to higher maintenance pricing, which is passed on to the client."

It's difficult for Gembecki to determine the added expense involved in picking up clippings and leaves, as opposed to mulching the clippings, because there are so many variables.

"Rates of grass growth in May are quite a bit different than October," he says. "Then again, there's a lot more debris and leaves in October than in May. And tipping fees have been rising steadily over the last several years because of lack

of space in landfills."

An informal survey finds a wide divergence in tipping fees across the country, from \$6 per ton in Dublin, Ohio, to \$42 per ton in Red Bluff, Calif.

"We've been offering the mulching as an option for about three years now and our clients love it," says Gembecki. "Not only is it more cost effective for our customers, but they feel like they're giving back by not sending their clippings and yard waste to some dump."

Mulching clippings and debris makes less work for crews, too. It also enables workers to complete their tasks efficiently.

Mulching mowers are designed to cut the grass blades several times by suspending the clippings above the bottom of the deck and allowing the grass to be sliced into very small particles.

The cutting feature allows for having less visible clippings and faster decomposition from shredding.

"In the fall, when leaves and clippings are heavy, I double mulch before I vacuum them," says Maddrell. "It reduces them substantially, and I can fit much more onto my truck. It also composts much faster, and I can then use it as a soil amendment the following season to till in beds."

Thomas is a Columbus, Ohio-based freelance writer.



EASY INSTALLATION IS A LOK.

Who says there are no sure things in construction? Hardscapes built and designed with VERSA-LOK are a cinch to go up quickly and easily. Our pinned in place design makes perfect installation and structural stability a sure thing. When you use VERSA-LOK, once it's built, it's built to last. And last. To create retaining walls, freestanding walls, columns, steps and ore with no need for special units, there's only one product to trust. Simple, reliable and beautiful. That's the VERSA-LOK promise.

To find out why landscape architects prefer VERSA-LOK, call (800) 770-4525 or visit www.versa-lok.com.



Freestanding Walls



Mosaic Random Face Patterns



Fully Integrated Stairs



Random-Pattern Tall Walls



Freestanding Columns



Multi-Angle Corners

VERSA-LOK®
Retaining Wall Systems
Solid Solutions™