

ASSISTED FROM THE CLASS C  
Alan Hill, Ruth Lake Country Club

# Simple Solutions at Ruth Lake Country Club



*I'm sure that by now everybody is fully aware of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. As I write this, it is day seventy-five. The long term affects of the spill will not be seen for many years, and who knows what this will entail. Pictures of birds and other marine life covered in thick crude oil, and all of the wetlands and habitats that are going to be ruined or severely damaged just reinforce our understanding of how important our environment is.*

All of this is happening at a time when our society is striving to become greener. It seems as if I hear the term "going green" everyday in the media. Every industry, not just ours, is feeling the push to become "more green." As environmental stewards, we are always looking for new ways to cut back on the amount and types of fertilizer and pesticides that we use on our golf courses. This is one way that we are becoming "more green." Another is establishing native areas. These require less input at the same time that they create habitat for birds and other wildlife. Another way that we are going "more green" is in recycling – both of consumer products and of plant material generated at our facilities.

Golf courses generate a lot of garbage or recyclables, as I like to call them, every year. Think about everything that you order: it comes in a box. All of the beverages that are consumed: they come in a can or bottle. It's easier to throw these in the garbage, but this adds to the overused landfills. Recycling reduces the amount of material that goes into landfills, at the same time that it conserves natural resources, preserving habitats for wildlife. At Ruth Lake we do our best to recycle consumer products. We have five recycling dumpsters and just two for regular garbage for the entire club. We need all five recycling dumpsters, as they are full by the time pick-up day comes. It's a good feeling to see the recycling dumpsters full, because this material is not going to the landfill and will be turned into something else. It takes just a little more time to get the recyclables to the correct bins but it's worth it, knowing that we our doing our part in having a greener facility.



Golf courses also generate a tremendous amount of plant debris. What do you do with all of the grass clippings, sod, aerifier plugs, branches, and the list goes on and on? Like so many other facilities in our area, we do not have the space to store everything. We don't have very much land to start with, and we have neighbors in close proximity. They don't want to see piles of plant debris. You can build only so many mounds with left-over soil and plugs. Branches pile up in a hurry, especially in years like this one, when storms are common. It can be quite expensive to have all of this debris hauled away.

Over the last several years, Ruth Lake has invested in a couple of pieces of equipment that help us minimize the space required to store this debris. It also gives us the capability to recycle some of it. The first piece is a brush chipper. We chip up limbs and sticks to reduce their size, allowing us to store them in the space that we have.

We then recycle these chips as mulch. Sometimes we use them ourselves; sometimes we find companies that will take them for free, or at a minimal charge, to process into mulch and resell. The second piece of equipment is a soil grinder that hooks up to the front of a bobcat. This allows us to grind up old sod, plugs, and any soil that is generated over the course of a year and recycle it into soil that we can reuse for various projects on the golf course. The best time to do this is in the summer, when it's dry and we can get the right mixture of sand, soil, and clay. We store the finished product in a couple of our storage bins for use at a later date. Since buying this implement, we haven't had to purchase any topsoil, and we're recycling material which is hard to store and haul away.

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Grass clippings, autumn leaves, and other small plant debris also piles up over the course of the year. We try to minimize the clippings and leaves that we collect by using mulching decks on all of our mowers. We also throw as many clippings as we can into our rough areas. However, they still pile up because we don't have enough out-of-the-way areas. We have to get this sort of debris hauled away periodically. It would be great to be able to store small plant debris in a compost pile, but we just don't have the room and our neighbors probably wouldn't appreciate the sight or smell of it. So we try to find companies that will take this material and recycle it into compost instead of sending it to the landfill. Because this small plant debris is the only type of material we have hauled away, it lowers our overall cost for hauling. We are recycling and reusing the materials that we can.

Recycling is just one of the ways we are striving to become a greener facility. We still have a lot of work to do in becoming "more green," but that's what keeps pushing us to come up with new ideas and to refine the practices that we've started. Recycling is not always an easy thing to do. It takes a little more time and in some cases a little more money. It is worth it in the long run. It's worth knowing that we are doing what is right for our environment and keeping up with the demands of society.

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