Pier Protection

by T. Patrick Stinson

Here in Montana where the frostline is deep, we pour various sizes of piers for decks, and for some reason not all of the concrete finds its way into our Sonotubes. While I use a canvas drop cloth to keep dirt from mixing with turf or landscape rock when I'm digging footing holes, canvas is not an option when pouring concrete. Instead, I use 3-mil contractor-grade bags to gather the overflow and ease the task of cleaning up my sloppy work.

Before I start to fill a tube, I center a 3-mil bag over the tube's top. Using a utility knife, I cut an X in the bag and slide it down over the sides of the tube. I pull on the corners so that the plastic lies flat on the ground, then place a few rocks or some dirt on the bag so that the wind doesn't lift it. After the concrete sets up a day or two later, I fold the bag from each corner and around the throat of the tube, and lift the bag carefully while gathering it together so nothing spills out. Then I simply throw the bag and debris away.

This approach works whether I'm pouring in a decorative rock garden or on a well-groomed lawn, and for any size tube or landscape. In fact, I use it every time I pour a pier, even if the ground doesn't need protection, because it makes cleanup so much easier and faster. The last thing I want to do is get on my hands and knees and pick up clumps of concrete. ❖

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Send Us Your Tips

We want your best deck-building tips. We're partnering with DeWalt to give away a power tool each issue to the reader who sends the best tip to prodeck@hanleywood.com. The prize for the July/August 2016 issue is a 20-volt brushless three-speed drill/driver kit. So, write up those tips. Don't sweat the grammar or the spelling—that's what editors get paid for. Take a photo (your camera's best setting, please), or send a sketch on the back of a napkin.