

## Recycling after the Holidays

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Now that the holidays are over, what can we do with the some of the holiday trappings that remain? UCCE (University of California Cooperative Extension) Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County offer the following tips for keeping real Christmas trees, strings of lights and #6 polystyrene foam out of the waste stream.

**Drop off Your Tree for Free in January:** Do you use a real tree to decorate for the holidays? Real, non-flocked trees can be recycled for free. Here's how, depending on where you live:

- In the Sonora/Twain Harte/Columbia area, take the tree to the Earth Resource Facility, located at 14909 Camage Avenue in East Sonora off Tuolumne Road. They are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9 am – 4 pm.
- In the south county area, take the tree to the Groveland Transfer Station at 10700 Merrell Road. They are open Wednesdays and Saturdays from 8 am – 4 pm.
- Call your local franchise trash hauler to make arrangements to have your tree picked up. This is a limited service and certain conditions apply.
- Or better yet, chip your tree at home and use the mulch on your property.

Please note: Tinsel, decorations and nails must be removed to recycle or mulch your tree.

Trees dropped off at the Earth Resource Facility will be ground into mulch. That “biomass” can be taken to a co-generation plant to be burned to generate electricity or used as an additive for compost at a local facility. The mulched trees can also be used as mulch on local farms and ranches or offered for sale to be used on your own property at the Earth Resource Facility. Benefits of mulch, especially appropriate during our hot, drought-stricken summers include: conserving water in your landscape, cooling soil temperatures, preventing the growth of weeds, reducing dust on pathways and adding nutrients to your compost pile.

As an extra special January incentive to recycle your real Christmas tree, the Earth Resource Facility is offering free mulch. Drop off a Christmas tree at the Earth Resource Facility during the month of January and take a load of mulch home for free!

**Green Waste Vouchers:** To discourage open burning the Tuolumne County Air District has a limited supply of vouchers for green waste disposal at the Earth Resource Facility. Instead of burning your leaves, pine needles and brush please consider taking them to the Earth Resource Facility where they will be recycled in one of the beneficial uses mentioned above. To get your voucher go to: [www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov](http://www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov) and type “green waste voucher” into the search box.

**Polystyrene Collection:** Once again, Master Gardeners will be collaborating with Waste Management, Inc. - Cal Sierra Disposal, Tuolumne County and Dart Container Corporation to keep #6 polystyrene out of the landfill. Collection dates are on two consecutive Saturdays – January 10 and 17, 2015, from 8:30 am – 3:30 pm. **Please note: the collection location has**

**changed.** Collection will be inside the gates at Waste Management's recycle center at 14959 Camage Ave., Sonora.

Some of the local requirements for recycling #6 polystyrene have changed. Please help spread the word. Deposit foam in a clear or translucent bag (unless pieces are too large to fit in a bag). Use one bag for **CLEAN** food containers and a separate bag for packaging. No straws, lids, or packing peanuts. Colored food containers, meat/vegetable trays, egg cartons, and cups are all accepted, as long as they are clean.

Clear bags are available at the following locations: UCCE office at 52 North Washington Street, Sonora; the "Farmory" Mountain People Organics located at the armory at Columbia Airport, open Wednesdays and Saturdays from 12 noon – 3 pm; and at the event.

**Packing "Peanuts" and Bubble Wrap:** Pac-n-Copy in the Junction Shopping Center in Sonora accepts both clean packing peanuts and clean bubble wrap. The UPS Store accepts packing peanuts.

**Strings of Holiday Lights:** If your holiday lights are old, unused or burned out, please don't throw them into a trash receptacle. Strings of lights can be recycled at R&S Metals, 13854 Mono Way across from the Junction Shopping Center. R&S is open Monday through Friday from 9 am to 5 pm. Their sign says they accept cardboard, appliances, electronics and metals.

With all of these options now available to us, Master Gardeners thank you for your efforts to reduce, reuse, recycle and repurpose. Wishing you happiness, health, prosperity and peace in the New Year!

*Rebecca Miller-Cripps recently retired from employment with University of California Cooperative Extension and is looking forward to volunteering as both a Master Gardener and a California Naturalist.*