

## Master Gardeners Host Polystyrene Recycling

Rebecca Miller-Cripps

Did you know—according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—that from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, household waste increases by more than 25%? Added food waste, disposable tree trimmings, shopping bags, packaging, wrapping paper, bows and ribbons all add an additional 1 million tons a week to our landfills, or 5 million extra tons by the time the holidays are over (<http://www.cawrecycles.org/recycling-news/greeningtheholidays>) .



One of those waste packaging products is what we commonly refer to as “styrofoam.” In reality, Styrofoam™ is the trade-marked brand of extruded polystyrene foam produced by the Dow Chemical Companies. It is known for its excellent insulating properties, its bright blue color and its use in construction where damp-proofing is required. It’s also used in floral arrangements.

However, the (usually) white, expanded—as opposed to extruded—polystyrene foam is a different material. Also an excellent insulator, it’s usually used in packaging materials. This is the stuff that Master Gardeners will be collecting once again on two days over one weekend in January. The dates are Saturday, January 21, 2017, from 9-4 and Sunday, January 22, from 10-2.

The drop-off will be held on Microtronics Way next to the Waste Management, Inc. site just off Camage Avenue in the Tuolumne Road industrial park. Take Tuolumne Road and follow the signs.

Waste Management (Cal Sierra Division) is providing two large open top dumpsters and two large metal racks. One rack will hold packing grade polystyrene; the other will hold food grade polystyrene separately. As in prior collections, the recycler will accept only **CLEAN FOOD CONTAINERS** which we ask you to put into **CLEAR** plastic bags. **Packing grade** polystyrene (used for shipping and wrapping items such as electronics) may be put into **colored** plastic bags.

All you have to do is load the material in your car or truck, drive on by, and Master Gardeners will help you unload. How can you participate?

- Look for the #6 in the recyclable triangle label on the bottom of the material.
- Donate only clean packaging foam and rigid, white, foam insulation.
- PLEASE remove all tape, labels, stickers, paint, cardboard and any other non-polystyrene materials.**
- Food containers need to be clean, with no food or grease residue.
- We cannot accept bubble wrap or packing peanuts.

Packaging foam is typically used to pack computers, TVs, appliances, furniture, wine, steaks, and medications. Foam insulation is typically used around building foundations and to insulate pipes.

Some packaging materials are now made from other kinds of foam. Only #6 expanded polystyrene foam can be reprocessed. For that reason, packing peanuts and other kinds of packaging materials, like bubble wrap, cannot be collected during the recycling event. Pac N Copy, in the Junction Shopping Center, and the UPS Store near Safeway in East Sonora will accept your packing peanuts and some other packaging materials.

Please don't toss this material into the trash – it's a disposal nightmare. The material collected will be trucked to a Lodi manufacturer that repurposes it into clean food containers.

Many cities, counties and other jurisdictions in California have banned the use of expanded polystyrene food containers. In addition, an organization called SOS—Save Our Shores—is working to protect our ocean from plastic pollution. For more suggestions on ways to “green your holidays” by reducing the use of plastics, go to: <http://www.cawrecycles.org/> or <http://saveourshores.org/>. And check out the article “Post Christmas: The Eco Way to Dispose of Holiday Trappings” at <http://earth911.com/>

Remember to save all that packing from your holiday gifts and bring it in January! We look forward to seeing you in the New Year, and thank you for again helping us keep this bulky material out of the landfill.

For additional information, please call the Tuolumne County Master Gardener Hotline at 209-533-5912 or email: [mgtuolumne@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgtuolumne@ucdavis.edu)

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