

T'is the Season – to Reduce Waste

by Rebecca Miller-Cripps

In the 2017 ULS (Use Less Stuff) Report, <http://use-less-stuff.com/>, Editor Bob Lilienfeld calculates that Americans are throwing away less packaging than previously. Between 2000 and 2014, the amount of packaging thrown away grew by 1.1% while population grew by 13% and real, inflation-adjusted, GDP grew by 14%. Thus, the amount of packaging we're throwing away per person in the U.S. diminished.

However, I think the noteworthy statistic is that the amount of packaging we're trashing continues to grow. According to Stanford University Recycling, <https://lbre.stanford.edu/pssistanford-recycling/frequently-asked-questions/frequently-asked-questions-holiday-waste-prevention>, "Americans throw away 25% more trash during the Thanksgiving to New Year's holiday period than any other time of year. The extra waste amounts to...about 1 million extra tons per week!"

We can do something about this! We can no longer justify that living in the "richest nation on Earth" grants us the privilege of using a disproportionate share of the Earth's resources. What to do? That old adage, "Think globally, act locally" still stands. Again, according to Stanford University, "If every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the 38,000 miles of ribbon saved could tie a bow around the entire planet. If every American family wrapped just 3 presents in re-used materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields. The 2.65 billion Christmas cards sold each year in the U.S. could fill a football field 10 stories high. If we each sent one card less, we'd save 50,000 cubic yards of paper."

Most gift wraps are now recyclable. If you still wrap holiday gifts in paper, check the back of the roll or sheet. When wrapping a gift a few days ago, I noticed that my roll of gift wrap was clearly printed on the back with the words "Gift wrap is 100% recyclable." Try wrapping gifts in old, torn, colorful paper maps. Use reusable bags, boxes and fabric wraps. Reuse it until no longer intact, and then recycle it.

Reuse greeting cards, if you still send them through the mail. One friend sent me a birthday greeting that was recycled. I didn't even notice until she told me. She cuts the front off a greeting card she has received, glues it to the right half of a sheet of paper, folds it in half, and writes a note inside. Or, use the front of a greeting card as a post card or a gift tag.

If you're using a cut, real Christmas tree, be sure to recycle it when you take it down. Tuolumne County Solid Waste Division of the Community Resources Agency is offering free Christmas tree drop-off through January. Take your tree to the Earth Resource Facility, 14909 Camage Ave, Sonora CA 95370, open: Tuesday - Saturday 8 am - 3:30 pm. Receive, FREE, one cubic yard of mulch which they will load for you. In Groveland, take your tree to the Groveland Transfer Station 10700 Merrell Rd, Groveland CA 95321, open: Wednesday and Saturday 8 am - 3:45 pm. Or better yet, chip your tree at home and use the mulch on your property.

A Master Gardener friend posted on Facebook that she attended a charity rummage sale and found an artificial tree for \$1! She reduced the amount of natural resources she consumes; she

reused an already manufactured product, saved money and donated to a charitable cause – quadruple score!

One more word about packaging: you know all those bulky items that come packed in extruded polystyrene foam? Save the rigid foam. Master Gardeners will once again be collecting it on Saturday, January 19 from 9 am - 4 pm and Sunday, January 20 from 10 am - 2 pm. Separate your clean food-grade polystyrene from packing-grade #6 foam, load it into your car and drive to Microtronics Way in East Sonora. Master Gardeners will unload your car and recycle the polystyrene.

If you're still in need of further recycling inspiration, check out Earth 911 at <https://earth911.com/>. Their website offers information about what to recycle and where, based on your zip code. It also provides articles about eco-friendly toy gifts for the children in your life and ideas for gorgeous, homemade gifts utilizing recycled Mason jars.

So, no matter how you celebrate, Happy Holidays from UC Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties. May your days be merry and bright with fewer trash items requiring disposal.

Rebecca Miller-Cripps is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County who chips her Christmas tree branches into mulch and recycles the trunk into firewood.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.