

## **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle in the Garden**

By Marlys Bell, Joan Bergsund, Al Dahlstrand, Carolee James, and Rebecca Miller-Cripps.

Economic realities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic are staring us in the face. In a newsletter wishing the human community a “Sustainable New Year,” Earth 911.com (<https://earth911.com/>) states: “This coming year will determine if society takes the pandemic’s lessons as an opportunity to create a sustainable world or simply falls back to the wasteful, environment-damaging ways that brought the atmosphere to the brink of irreversible global warming. It will be one of the most important years in history.” As the holidays wind down, it’s a good time to stop and reflect on some ways to use less and save a little more.

**Reduce your lawn.** Consider reducing the area you have devoted to grass. Perhaps it’s beautiful to look at, but less might just be more—less effort, less disease, less water, less synthetic fertilizer.

Enlarge the space you have allowed around the base of trees, particularly all our drought-happy oaks. Cut away the sod and add it to your compost heap. Don’t plant these areas; just fill with your choice of mulch, focusing attention on the tree rather than on the bed beneath it.

How about enlarging the garden beds next to the lawn? Lay out your garden hose to imagine another two feet or more of beds. Cut the new edge, lift the sod, turn over and chop, chop, chop. Let the old sod create compost, and by next spring, it will be ready to plant. In the meantime, you can be reading the garden catalogs and making your selections.

**Speaking of catalogs: Reduce junk mail.** If you really don’t want all those credit card and insurance offers, “opt out” every time your financial service provider gives you the chance. Call or log on and ask them not to share your information. Go to Catalog Choice [www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org) and request to be taken off the list of catalogs you don’t wish to receive.

**Reuse items in the garden.** Another approach for reducing lawn size is to create a display area for garden sculpture. Again, use your hose to lay out a pleasing shape. Remove the sod, fill the area with mulch, and place the object for all to admire. It could be a true sculpture or a relic of old farm equipment or some handsome rocks.

Use old pieces of furniture or other cast-offs as garden art and planting containers. An old bowling ball or rusted bits of metal that have interesting shapes can become whimsical garden art. A battered wooden or metal chair can hold a planter or become one. Shop garage sales for inexpensive items that can be turned into wonderful assets for the garden. Look for pots, glazed and/or clay, old birdhouses, rusted metal farm tools, old gardening tools, and even broken statuary. Old metal headboards and footboards can be placed in the garden with plants creating the ‘bed.’ Recycle pots and saucers into a water source for wildlife or a water feature. Let your imagination be your guide.

**Recycle organic matter: compost.** Master Gardeners encourage composting on-site to return nutrients to the soil from where they came. Raking and burning leaves or hauling your fire-safe pruning to the slash site only removes nutrients from your soil that then must be replaced by

artificial means. Create your own compost and mulch—for information, go to the Backyard Recycling Guide on the Tuolumne County Garbage & Recycling website.

**Capture your rainwater on site to reduce water used for irrigation.** For information, call the UCCE Master Gardener help line (209-533-5912 in Tuolumne County, 209-754-2880 in Calaveras County) or fill out our [easy-to-use problem questionnaire](#). Pick up the books Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond, Volumes 1 and 2, by Brad Lancaster. An author from Arizona, Brad recommends planting native and adapted plants in small depressions to take advantage of the local weather patterns. His plantings do not need additional irrigation beyond what they receive in rainfall. He also recommends creating earthwork patterns to move water slowly through the lawn and garden, allowing water to percolate through the soil, rather than running off.

**Other ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle:**

**Plant a tree.** You'll help reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

**Replace a light bulb.** Exchange an incandescent bulb for a long-lived LED one.

**Remove a noxious weed.** Pull some ivy, vinca, or broom plant; Hand-pull a patch of yellow starthistle. Plant a California native or something edible in its place.

**Don't drive.** Set aside one day to only walk or ride your bike (non-motorized transportation). Stay home and burn less fuel.

**Use your own mug.** Each year Americans throw away 25 BILLION Styrofoam cups, creating plastic micro-trash and a landfill space problem.

Of course, we've just scratched the surface about ways to be "care-full" of our gardens and landscapes. Master Gardeners wish you a sustainable New Year.

*This article is a collaborative effort, involving the ideas and writings of current and former University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County Marlys Bell, Joan Bergsund, Al Dahlstrand, Carolee James, and Rebecca Miller-Cripps.*

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/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook.