

Stop Waste at the Start

by Marlys Bell, UCCE Tuolumne County Master Gardener

Earth Day, April 22, 2009, is a good time to reflect upon how each of us can be a better caretaker for our planet. The mantra “**reduce, reuse, and recycle**” is a helpful starting point. Each Tuolumne County resident generates about 8 pounds of waste per day. **Reducing the amount of waste going into the waste management system and preventing it from getting into streams, lakes and watersheds** is an area where we can each make an impact. The areas that are easiest to reduce, reuse or recycle for most households are **food and yard waste**. Together they comprise about 40% of waste collected in Tuolumne County.

Whenever I am at the kitchen sink gathering up food scraps, I hear “me, me.” My **two dogs** are patiently watching for leftover soup, meat, eggs, sweet potatoes, etc. They love even the woody stems of raw carrots, broccoli and asparagus, celery and arugula. Outside, the **goats and llamas** seem to say, “don’t forget us” and happily eat most peelings, stems, cores and end-of-the-season vegetable garden plants like cabbage, broccoli and lettuce. And my newest pets, the **red wiggler worms**, eat any extra greens, coffee grounds, eggshells, banana peels and over-ripe fruit. The scraps that no one likes, such as citrus rinds, or are potentially poisonous* go into the **composter**.

- For more **information on composting** visit the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden at 251 S. Barretta Street in Sonora on the first Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. or call 533-5696.

For gardens that produce more than the family needs, **local food distribution centers** always need fresh produce:

- **ATCAA**’s (Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency’s) **Food Bank** is open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 10059 Victoria Way, near the animal shelter and Humane Society.
- They also encourage gardeners to plant extra fruit or vegetables as part of the “**Plant a Row**” program. Last year thousands of pounds of produce were contributed to that program and the need is expected to be even greater this year. Contact Lee Kimball at 984-3960 ext. 102 for more information.
- In Calaveras County, gardeners can also participate in the **Gardener to Family** program. Contact Sean Kriletich (skriletich@ucdavis.edu or 402-7801) for more information.
- **Interfaith Community Social Services** at 18500 Striker Court (532-0905) also welcomes food donations from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday-Friday in the back of the building.
- The **Sierra Senior Providers Inc.** (Sonora Senior Center, 533-2622) on Greenley Road by the library also accepts food for the Meals on Wheels program. Ask for Randy, Joy or Maggie Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Individuals donating food are protected from liability issues by the Good Samaritan Act provisions and contributions may be tax deductible.

Our household goal is to **reuse or recycle all yard waste:**

- Tree trunks are used not only for **firewood** but also cut into slices for **stepping-stones** and **garden paths**.
- Paper is shredded for the **worms' bedding** or the composter, and cardboard and whole newspaper pages are used as **weed barriers** covered by pine needles or mulch made of tree trimmings.
- We deliberately leave **brush piles for wildlife** habitat in areas that can be left more natural.
- Take yard waste **to recycling sites** that turn it into compost. In addition to the site on Camage, the Plainview Slash Site off 108 near Twain Harte reopened on April 18th. They are now open from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Thursday-Monday until mid June when they will be open 7 days a week. They charge \$8 per yard. For more information about what they accept, call 768-1794.

For **hazardous household waste**, **Saturday, April 25** is the next free drop-off day in Sonora. **Call 1-800-811-2435 for an appointment (required).**

Master Gardeners are collecting Styrofoam at Waste Management on Camage Avenue on **Saturday, April 25, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.; Sunday, April 26, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

Take advantage of these opportunities to do some spring cleaning and be kind to the environment at the same time. Combine that with recycling food and yard waste and you'll save money and stop waste at the start. For more ideas, contact the Tuolumne County Solid Waste Management Division at 533-5588 or the Cooperative Extension office at 533-5695.

Marlys Bell is using her property as a demonstration of living more green.

*Obviously extreme caution must be exercised when feeding human food scraps or garden cuttings or plants to animals. **Some are deadly poisonous**—such as tomato and potato stems and leaves, asparagus and rhubarb foliage, green potatoes, grapes/raisins, mushrooms, chocolate, macadamia nuts, onions, garlic, coffee, tea, alcohol, fruit seeds and pits. Also examine labels. For example, baby food frequently has onions or garlic. Lists of plants and relative toxicity can be found on numerous web sites and should be checked in advance of feeding it for the first time. Human food should be fed in small quantities and monitored for impact. Your local veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Control Center (www.ASPCA.org or 888-426-4435) should be consulted in case of emergency.