

## **Celebrate Earth Day: Another Way of Acting Together to Achieve Mutual Benefit**

In light of our human challenge in dealing with COVID-19, the slogan “Think Globally, Act Locally” takes on significant new meaning. Media articles, ranging from the Washington Post to the New Zealand Herald, have reported on improved air quality as we shelter-in-place. Satellite data in March confirmed reduced nitrogen oxides in the air above Spain. Reports from China to Italy bear out the same results.

It is clear that the behavior of each individual has an enormous cumulative effect, despite what nay-sayers would have us believe. So, why not take this collective action one step further?

Earth Day is Wednesday, April 22, 2020. As you work from home, school your children at the kitchen table, or venture out for an essential activity, consider the effect of your actions. Each year we produce tons of solid waste, some of which is poisonous, dangerous, or creates bulky disposal problems. In honor of Earth Day and in acknowledgement of our shared human dilemma, Tuolumne County Master Gardeners are offering the following suggestions for celebrating Earth Day on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and on every day after that.

**Choose Hope and Invest in the Community.** According to Earth911.com, (<https://earth911.com/living-well-being/climate-change-covid-19-sensational-news/>), we may not be able to control our circumstances or the sensational news, but we can control our response. Choose an activity to do with members of your household or take a walk to view spring flowers. Go on a scavenger hunt in the backyard with your children and look for insect eggs. Identify them using images from the Internet.

Earth911.com offers excellent articles about home schooling children during this time. They also offer advice about recycling used disposable gloves (yes, it can be done) and how to cut down on paper waste. Check out the “5 Simple Earth Day Crafts Your Kids Will Love” or how to create an earth-friendly meal. And why not support your local favorite restaurant by ordering a take-out meal to celebrate Earth Day? Some restaurants already package take out items in paper and aluminum foil to reduce the use of polystyrene foam.

**Dispose of Household Hazardous Waste and Styrofoam.** Create your own Earth Day celebration and household clean-up day. Segregate your unused household chemicals and that bulky, what-do-I-do-with-this Styrofoam. Save it in a safe place until we’re able to dispose of it properly through Household Hazardous Waste collection days and the Master Gardener polystyrene foam collection (hopefully in June). Watch our column and local calendars for more information as it becomes available.

**Plant a tree.** You'll help reduce carbon dioxide—a greenhouse gas—in the atmosphere (carbon sequestration) and celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day, all at the same time.

**Create a compost pile.** Recycle those yard and garden clippings and prunings into “Gardener’s Gold” on-site. Keep your green waste out of the waste stream. Turn the compost pile you already have. Help nature’s decomposition process along.

**Replace a light bulb.** Exchange an incandescent bulb for a long-lived LED one. You'll help reduce energy use in your home, thus requiring less energy generation from the burning of fossil fuels and other sources.

**Remove an invasive plant.** Pull some ivy; remove your vinca, or tear out a broom plant (maybe even one that you planted in error). Plant a California native in its place. Hand pull a patch of yellow star thistle.

**Don’t drive.** Set aside one day to only walk or ride your bike (non-motorized transportation). Stay home and burn less fuel in honor of Earth Day. (Have you noticed a difference in gas consumption since we’ve been driving less?)

In conclusion, if there’s anything that COVID-19 has taught us, it’s that the small individual actions of many people create a community-wide and worldwide positive impact. Let’s do more of that!

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*UCCE Central Sierra Master Gardeners can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 in Tuolumne County, 209-754-2880 in Calaveras County or fill out our [easy-to-use problem questionnaire](#). Check out our [UCCE Master Gardener website](#). You can also find us on Facebook.*