

What about Styrofoam?

Is polystyrene (aka Styrofoam) recyclable?

Many people are under the impression that molded Styrofoam is recyclable. Unfortunately, it is not.

Styrofoam is only one name for a material called 'expanded polystyrene plastic' or EPS. EPS is a petroleum by-product, first commercially produced during World War II in the production of synthetic rubber. EPS is most often referred to as Styrofoam, although "Styrofoam" is actually a brand of home insulation trademarked by Dow Chemical.

Polystyrene comes in two forms: molded pieces and as 'peanuts.' Molded pieces are used to make coffee cups, salad boxes, trays, egg cartons, and protective packaging, to name a few uses. Molded polystyrene provides many benefits including an insulating quality that helps hold food at temperature.

Because molded polystyrene is 95% air, it is nearly impossible to recycle. When baled for transport, it falls apart so quickly that bulk packaging and shipping is out of the question. As it is not recyclable, molded polystyrene should be disposed of as trash.

Save those peanuts!

A second form of polystyrene protective packaging is the loose fill we call 'peanuts.' Because of its large bulk and light weight, it is also cost prohibitive to transport peanuts to a recyclable processing plant in less than industrial quantities. But whereas molded polystyrene is not recyclable, 'peanuts' are easily re-useable. Nearly 30% of all polystyrene loose fill is used again. For mailing services, the reuse rate of loose fill is as high as 50%.

You can take your peanuts to several local businesses and drop them off at no charge. These businesses, in turn, will re-use the peanuts. The peanuts you 'recycle' should be clean and free of any plastic film, loose parts, or glued-on cardboard.

The following local businesses recycle plastic peanuts:

Postal Center USA
141 Memorial Parkway
Shaw's Plaza
Randolph
781 963-7007

Braintree Parcel Express
346 Washington Street
Braintree
781 849-0233

Once you have identified the closest collection site and have collected a large supply, call these businesses to verify drop-off times and check to see what types of polystyrene material they accept.

For other locations that accept peanuts free of charge, please call the Peanut Hotline (800 828-2214).

Spring tip for gardeners:

Put packing peanuts about four inches deep in a large pot, then cover them with landscape fabric. Fill the rest of the pot with soil and plant roses or hibiscus. The peanuts provide good drainage for large plants and keeps the pot from being so heavy...