

Floral Foam: An Unnecessary Danger to the Environment

By Maria Bartlett

Invented in 1954, this dense, lightweight material holds water and supports flower stems effortlessly, which instantly made it a favorite of professional and amateur florists alike. But floral foam is not safe to use for the environment and human health.



Floral Foam Blocks

ISSUES OF CONCERN:

- It does not decompose readily, taking thousands of years to break down
- It's made from petrochemicals
- As it breaks down, it creates microplastics that pollute water sources and kill wildlife
- The microplastics enter water systems and the food chain, harming human health
- It's very toxic, containing high levels of formaldehyde, barium sulfate and carbon black
- EPA has classified it as a "probably human carcinogen."
- The Royal Horticultural Society in the UK banned it's use in 2020.

ECO-FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVES:

There are many eco-friendly alternatives to floral foam. Many florists have stopped using floral foam, and many flower shows include strict guidelines discouraging its use. Here are some easy alternatives:

- Armatures
- Chicken wire
- Container with openings
- Flat wire ball
- Floral mesh
- Grids-manufactured
- Grids-created with tape
- Hair Pin frogs
- Kenzan (pin holders)
- Plant material as support
- Stones as stem support
- Water tubes
- Hand-tying arrangements
- Sustainable floral blocks*
- Sustainable H2O pouches*



Water Tubes



Chicken Wire

*These new block products advertise "sustainability." Check them out carefully since not all aspects of the products are always truly safe, biodegradable, compostable and non-toxic. Use sparingly as a last resort. Examples include: Oshun-Pouch, TerraBrick, Earthwool, Bio-Floral Foam, etc.

CAREFUL DISPOSAL IS NECESSARY WHEN USING FLORAL FOAM:

- It is a plastic that cannot be recycled and is not biodegradable
- It should be put in the trash
- It should not be put in the compost, the garden, or outside into the environment
- Water containing foam fragments should not be poured down the sink or storm drain



Grids - Handmade and Manufactured

SUMMARY:

Because floral foam is easy to obtain and use, making the change to eco-friendly and sustainable floral design products and methods can initially take more time, planning and effort....at first. With practice, alternative methods will become 'second nature' for us all. The pay off will be huge - a cleaner environment for the future! With more ecological awareness and practice, we can make the switch!!

For Garden Clubs: Consider asking your program presenters not to use floral foam when doing presentations for your garden club members!

RESOURCES:

- Guide to Floral Mechanics, Sarah Diligent and William Mazuch
- A Beginner's Guide to Foam Free Mechanics, Ellen Frost

CREDITS: Based on Tower Hill Flower Show display by Kathy Hawes of Sharon Garden Club, and Mayflower article by Karen Brockelbank.



Hand-tying



Floral Mesh



Hair Pin Frog



Armature



Colored Stones



Kenzan



Container With Openings