

Trashmagination Podcast 1

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. This is the first episode. I'm Carla Brown.

This podcast is mostly for people who like to make things. However, I believe anyone who wants to think about life in terms of abundance would enjoy the podcast. So if you looking for a way to feel more optimistic about how much is possible in the most mundane beginnings, come listen to this podcast.

The name Trashmagination is a mash-up of the quote "Trash is the failure of imagination," which is a quote from creative reuse artist Aaron Kramer. I love this quote because it emphasizes how trash can be solved with imagination, and imagination is a renewable resource!

I started blogging as Trashmagination in 2012 as a way of sharing my lifelong hobby of making things from trash that are useful and beautiful. Now I'm obsessed with podcasts so I thought I would give it a try. Welcome to Trashmagination.

So let's start with a segment called **Trashmagination Techniques and Tools**. I'll share a Trashmagination project and what it taught me about a certain type of trash.

Today's featured trash item is plastic milk jugs.

I grew up in eastern Canada, and our milk was sold in clear plastic bags. We had this special plastic milk bag holder that would keep the bag upright. You snip a little corner of the bag to pour out the milk.

But when I moved to the United States as an adult, most milk here was sold in plastic jugs. They are such a great material for Trashmagination projects. You can easily clean them and cut them into thin plastic panels using kitchen shears. You don't really need special tools to cut them.

Here's how I process plastic milk jugs. I take my shears and stick them in the hole where the milk pours out and then just start cutting. The first cut through the neck of the jug is tough because there are ridges where the cap screws on to the jug, but it gets easier from then on.

To ensure I get the plastic very clean, I cut the jugs into flat panels. That means I cut along the four corners of the jug and I cut off the bottom. I typically recycle the section which has the cap and handle, and I also recycle the bottom. I remove the stickers and wash the panels in soapy water. I then save the panels for lots of crafts.

Here's an example of how I use these panels. There are these events called Maker Faires. They happen all over the world. A few years ago, a group of volunteers started a Maker Faire in my hometown and I applied to have a table. I cut out about 1000 butterfly shapes from milk jug panels. I got the idea from a blog called Filth Wizardry. The blogger had a free printable with butterfly shapes. It took a lot of milk jugs to prepare for the faire and you only get maybe four butterflies from each jug. I don't even buy my milk in plastic jugs most of the time. I buy it from a farmer who delivers it in glass jugs. So when I need this type of plastic, I just walk around my neighborhood on recycling night and take them from my neighbors recycling bins. This works best in the winter when it is cool outside so the milk jugs do not get smelly.

I cut butterfly shapes but you could cut out any shape your heart desires. Is your child into horses or sharks, cars or spaceships? You can color on the plastic. It works best to use permanent markers or the marker will just wipe off, so this works best with older children or you can put a smock over their clothing.

Plastic milk jugs here in the US come in clear plastic or opaque plastic. The clear plastic works great as a suncatcher.

Next I'll answer a **Listener Question**. Since this is my first episode, I thought about questions that my friends have asked me in the past. Today's question is from my friend Emily. She asked: "**How do you come up with your project ideas?**"

Project ideas tend to come from two sources – the trash itself or an idea for an end product. Let me give an example of each kind.

So for an example of a project that was inspired by the trash – my kids used to enjoy eating applesauce as a snack. I would buy the individual servings for their lunch boxes. So I started to clean and collect those little clear cups.

Once I had about 50, I stopped collecting them until I could think of a project. Unfortunately, I could not think of one and I had this box of cups for maybe three years. Finally, one day I said I just have to get rid of this collection of cups. And of course that is when I thought of a project.

So I noticed the cups from a certain brand of applesauce had a design of a wood grain engraved in the plastic. When I put the cups together, they looked like a wooden barrel. So I play taiko or Japanese drums and our drums are made from barrels. So I designed a taiko ornament from these cups. You can see how it turned out at my blog, trashmagination.com and I'll link in the show notes as well.

Now here's an example of a project where I had the end in mind first. One year for Christmas my daughter asked for a model of a shark anatomy. This was a plastic model that shows all the organs of the shark. On Christmas day, she was playing with it and almost immediately she broke the little plastic stand that held it up. I ended up making a replacement piece for the stand, but it got me thinking about how maybe I could have made her a shark anatomy model instead of buying one.

I imagined using a clear soda bottle as the body of the shark, and then all the organ pieces would go inside that bottle. I sewed a shark skin from stiffened felt made from recycled soda bottles. I call it my TrashAnatomy Shark and actually I want to make a whole series of them for other species.

So you see, I can get the ideas from the trash or from an end product. I would say most of my ideas come from the trash first. I tend to be attracted to things that are colorful and easy to clean. I think about whether the item is easy to manipulate – like I could sew it or drill it with a drill press.

If I collect a type of trash and after a while it becomes clear that I don't have an idea for it, I offer it to my friends who are teachers. I don't just drop off a box of trash. I research to find Pinterest projects that use that trash item. I typically do not replicate other people's creative reuse ideas but my friends can still teach those to their students. In fact, there are places across the country that collect trash and design curriculum around those trash items for teachers.

Another place I donate clean trash is to local farmers. For example, they often like clean egg cartons, berry baskets and even plastic bags – but of course you should ask first.

Wine corks are very popular with many crafters.

My goal if possible is to find someone who really wants to use the trash collection rather than just putting it in the recycling bin. Reuse is better than recycling, which takes energy to break down the materials.

So for future podcasts, I would love to answer your question about creative reuse. Just email your question to trashmagination@gmail.com.

The next segment is a **Trashmagination Tale**. I'm going to tell you a story about a really special experience I had when I was a teenager which I believe helped plant the seeds for Trashmagination.

I grew up in Atlantic Canada. When I was 16 years old, I applied to attend a college called Pearson College. It is a United World College, which is a network of about 16 schools with the goal of creating a global community of students who work towards a more peaceful and sustainable future. I went for the equivalent of grade 12 and first year university. If you are around 15-17 years old, I highly encourage you to apply to these colleges. Many are full-scholarship opportunities.

Anyhow in 1989, I was chosen to attend Pearson College which is located on Vancouver Island. Each year, we had a week called Project Week where students would do student-lead projects off campus. I had the opportunity to volunteer at a recycling center on Hornby Island.

Hornby Island is a small island near Vancouver Island. Since the 1970s, the residents have had a goal of producing as little trash as possible. Residents realized long before recycling was available elsewhere that they had limited space for trash. They created a recycling center and free store. A free store is a place where people can bring unwanted items for others to take. It was a lot of effort and cost to travel off-island to buy things. The free store is still open to this day – in fact they just put up a new building for it.

The Pearson College students lived in a home of a local resident that was so beautiful. I still can picture the rooms. The door handles were made from driftwood. We gathered eggs and apples. Most of the food was served on pottery made by local artists. When we went to the Hornby Island Co-op, we brought pottery to hold the items we bought such as honey and most food items were sold in bulk without the packaging. At another home, it was the first time I saw a composting toilet.

After our week volunteering on Hornby Island, a fellow student and dear friend Lilian worked with the facilities manager Leo at Pearson College to get an industrial composter built at the school. We students bring down the scraps from the kitchen each day and turn over the compost from one section to the other. It's my understanding that the composter still works.

So that's my **Trashmagination Tale** for this podcast!

Next let me share a **Trashmagination Quotation**. I love to read books about creative reuse and I highly recommend the book *Garbage Land: On the Secret Trail of Trash* by Elizabeth Royte. In the book, she talks about a song she used to sing to her daughter and one line of the song was, "It really isn't garbage until you mix it all together."

I think this is an astute observation, that a lot of trash becomes trash because it's slimy or sticky. But often there are a lot of ways to clean up the trash without much effort and make it into something awesome. More on that in future podcasts!

So that's the end of my first Trashmagination podcast.

You can follow Trashmagination on Facebook or Instagram. On Facebook, I regularly post links to my Trashmagination artist crushes. These are artists who I admire for their use of unusual materials. You can also see photos of my creative reuse projects.

Until next time – May you see your trash as just another source of art in your life.