



Trashmagination Podcast 6 – Wine Corks: The Perfect Creative Reuse Starter Item

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Today I'm going to focus on wine corks and why I think they are a great place to start if you want to test out this practice of creative reuse in your life.

Wine corks are a socially acceptable item to collect. Some people even save corks from special occasions. They label corks with the date and occasion and keep them in a glass jar. Wine corks have a faint smell, but it's not a bad smell.

If you collect wine corks in quantity, there are a lot of crafters who would love to have them. I used to bundle them up into groups of about 500 and put it on Freecycle, and I would get inundated by requests.

My friend Monique has an Etsy store called MojoMakery where she makes wedding name cards from wine corks. She cuts them in a certain way so they hold a name card, and she sells thousands of dollars worth. She has figured out the perfect knife for cutting the corks. So if I ever have too many, I just give them to Monique.

I have made 3 projects from wine corks in my life.

- A bath mat
- Tiny drum ornaments
- A Cub Scout action figure

My wine cork bath mat has consistently been in my top 10 pages on my blog for more than four years, so clearly this is a topic people find interesting.

I got this idea from a blog called Crafty Nest back in 2010. I will link to their tutorial and my blog in the show notes.

The most common question I get about my wine cork bath mat is – did it fall apart? Can it handle the wear and tear? It has been almost four years and the wine cork mat is still great. It's in our guest bathroom, so it is not in our most high-traffic bathroom. The main thing I have had to repair about once a year is that in the corners, some of the corks have come loose from the sewing, so I had to re-sew down the corks. I haven't needed to replace any of the corks. I didn't put any sealant on the corks – they are naturally water repelling and anti-fungal.

The next question I get asked is – how did you gather 175 wine corks when you don't even drink wine? In 2013, I was working in an office. I sent an email to my colleagues telling them I was collecting wine corks and put a labelled bucket in an easily accessible place. Since I became a solopreneur, the way I collect items for other projects is by asking my neighbors and friends. This takes longer, but it works for some types of trash.

Of all the items I have ever collected, wine corks was the easiest to get in quantity fast! People don't have to clean wine corks. If people have to clean the item, that's a stumbling block to gathering it in quantity. I'm thinking about items like individual yogurt containers which people often throw out. I have experienced situations where people put a dirty container in the bucket and that's just nasty.

The risk with collecting anything in an anonymous location is that people put weird stuff in the bucket. To avoid that, you might put the bucket in your cubicle if possible so people are not tempted to dump odd items in there. Even then, people often dropped things off at my desk before I came in the morning. Most of the time that was fine, but once I came to find a big pile of twine that smelled like horse manure. I think someone thought I could find a reuse solution for the twine that held their hay bales together, but that was just not a good option.

When I was in a workplace, people would confess to me, often on Mondays, about the items they threw out over the weekend. My colleagues who sat near my cube would joke that I was like a priest taking confessions.

How do I feel when people confess that they threw something out that they thought could be reused? When I was growing up, I participated in a leadership program called the Youth Leadership Council. The model we followed was leadership through service, meaning that you live your life to the best of your abilities with integrity and others will see you do that and then you are a leader. I have always been more comfortable with that style of leadership than one where I tell you what to do. I mean – your life circumstances are your own. I'm just going to suggest ideas and give you a little boost if you want that reminder about being more mindful.

Sometimes I worry that if I make a project from trash, it's like I'm saying it is okay that we consumed that item and produced that trash. I do think that avoiding purchasing packaging in the first place is the best approach and there are inspiring experts in this like Bea Johnson from Zero Waste Home. She does things like bring a glass or metal jar to the grocery store to buy items like meat or fish. Her example inspired entrepreneurs to start grocery stores focused on buying in bulk. When I was a kid, these were more common, although people didn't tend to bring their own containers but used the plastic bags at the store. I love how this generation is revitalizing that practice and making it easy and cool.

There are always going to be people who are taking this further. We can each be a model. I'm hoping Trashmagination can model how to process packaging if you find you have it. We can make something from almost anything!

You can check out my Pinterest board with cork projects where you can get tips on how to make the corks easier to cut, as well as projects such as a back-splash, wreath, crafting stamps, bulletin boards and corn holders.

There are also a whole bunch of projects that involve making little creatures and ornaments from corks. Reindeers are really popular as well as super-heroes. Some people make little boats from them to sail down your nearest stream. And I love these little Day of the Dead skull crafts made from those corks that are curved with the bulbous part at the top.

Great idea – put a slice from a wine cork under your chairs and table legs to keep them from scratching hardwood floor.

Also, the name Trashmagination was inspired by this quote by the artist Aaron Kramer – his quote was “Trash is the failure of imagination” Anyhow - one of his most famous projects was making an armchair from wine corks.

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

- Wine Cork Bath Mat – Trashmagination version - <http://trashmagination.com/wine-cork-bath-mat/>
- Crafty Nest – <http://www.craftynest.com/2010/03/wine-cork-bath-mat/>
- MoJoMakery - <https://www.etsy.com/shop/MoJoMakery>
- Cub Scout craft - <http://trashmagination.com/webelos-cub-scout-craft-from-recycled-materials/>
- Taiko craft - <http://trashmagination.com/taiko-crafts-from-recycled-plastic-caps-and-wine-corks/>
- Bea Johnson Zero Waste Home - <http://www.zerowastehome.com/>
- Trashmagination Pinterest – Cork projects - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/cork/>
- Aaron Kramer's wine cork chair - <http://www.urban-objects.com/>