



Trashmagination Podcast #10 – Mattress & Box Spring Recycling

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

Today we're talking about what to do with old mattresses & box springs. This is a popular topic. A blog I wrote four years ago has consistently been the most popular blog on Trashmagination!

There is an interesting psychological element to throwing out giant items. It is one thing to throw away many small pieces of trash, but when you have a whole mattress or box spring, it just seems suddenly like there must be a better answer! I think that's actually very interesting statement about how we feel about trash, and why it is so easy to not think about trash in a big picture way. I'll talk about what I did in that blog in a minute, but first let's paint a picture of how most mattress and box springs end up today in the US.

So at least 20 million mattress and box springs are thrown out every year in the United States¹ or about 50,000 per day². That is a LOT of trash. And here's the kicker – about 85% of the contents of a mattress and its box springs — the coils, foam, cotton, wood — can be recycled³.

The challenge is that mattresses and box springs need to be taken apart into their components to be recycled. That doesn't happen in most places. Most of the time when you purchase a new mattress, the mattress company takes it away. Most of those companies pay to have the mattresses incinerated or they ship them to states with the least-expensive landfills.

Only three states are doing something more creative – California, Connecticut and Rhode Island. In each place, the state charges a fee of about \$10 to pay for recycling the old mattress and box spring. Contractors take apart the mattresses, saving a lot of landfill costs. It also provides employment. In January 2017, the program recycled its millionth mattress⁴. Can you imagine how many more would be recycled if this type of legislation was passed in more than 3 states? There are mattress recycling facilities in about 20 states, but only incentive programs in three.

The mattress recycling program is called Bye Bye Mattress (<http://byebyemattress.com/>), which features a map where you can see places to bring mattresses and box springs in those states. It is managed by the Mattress Recycling Council, which is located less than an hour from my home, but ironically there is not a mattress and box spring recycling program in my state of Virginia.

Another benefit of having coordinated mattress and box spring recycling is that often these programs also help with picking up old mattress & box springs from people's homes. This reduces the ugly sight of seeing those dumped alongside the road.

¹ <http://www.consumerreports.org/mattresses/mattress-recycling-is-easier-than-you-think/>

² <http://byebyemattress.com/>

³ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/08/16/massachusetts-wants-more-mattresses-recycled/EgMk1Fu11U5z2A1xzTEIDN/story.html>

⁴ <http://mattressrecyclingcouncil.org/2017/01/mrc-marks-millionth-mattress-milestone/>

Now I'll share my own mattress and box spring creative reuse project.

In 2004, I read a book called *Conscious Style Home* by Danny Seo (https://www.amazon.com/Conscious-Style-Home-Eco-Friendly-Century/dp/0312276613/ref=sr_1_1). He describes taking apart a mattress to its component parts for recycling. I loved the idea that you could fit that mattress into a single garbage bag, once you had recycled all the other components. I wanted to give it a try. My co-worker Erik was throwing out an old mattress and box spring.

I took apart the mattress and box spring on my front yard because I figured it would be quite messy and we don't have a big enough back yard. You can see my step-by-step process on my blog (<http://trashmagination.com/recycling-a-mattress-and-box-spring/>). The remaining items did fit into a garbage bag.

Many people left comments thanking me for giving them the confidence to tackle a similar project. It is daunting if you don't know what to expect when you start peeling off the layers.

Finally I collected some craft projects on a Pinterest board (<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/mattress-and-box-spring/>). Most of these projects use the metal coils from the mattress. I considered some similar ideas but found the coils were covered in grease that I found difficult to remove even with a degreaser. But if you are keen to figure that out, some ideas include:

- a wind chime, a vase and a photo display - <http://recycledcrafts.craftgossip.com/7-ways-to-reuse-old-bed-springs/2015/03/10/>
- a Christmas tree craft - <http://www.daniellesplace.com/html/christmas-crafts-Page-4.html>
- Wine rack - <http://how-to-recycle.blogspot.com/2015/01/upcycled-rusty-bed-springs.html>
- Light fixtures where you put glass jars with a candle in the coil - <http://how-to-recycle.blogspot.com/2015/01/upcycled-rusty-bed-springs.html>
- Tree topper - <https://www.etsy.com/listing/484130733/rustic-christmas-tree-topper-bed-spring>
- Raised bed garden - <http://best5zach.blogspot.com/2015/04/how-to-build-raised-herb-garden-from.html?m=1>
- Laundry organizing rack - <http://adiamondinthestuff.com/2013/10/crib-spring-drying-rack-wash-room-decor.html>

When I looked on Etsy, people sell bed spring coils not made into crafts – just search for “bed spring.”

My husband is hoping someone figured out how to make springs you put on your shoes so you can bounce around?

This is my 10th podcast and I hope you have been finding value from listening to these ideas. If so, could you post a review of the podcast on iTunes? It's my understanding that podcasts with reviews tend to be recommended more by iTunes to other listeners, so let's get more people thinking about creative reuse.

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