



## Trashmagination Podcast #11 – Plastic Cap Crafts

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

Today we're talking about crafts from plastic caps. As you know, there is a huge challenge with plastic in our oceans, and plastic caps are very commonly found on beach clean-ups.

I know it can be confusing when it comes to plastic cap recycling – do they go in the recycling bin? There are two reasons why this is confusing. First, bottle caps are often a different type of plastic than the bottles themselves. Second, most plastic caps do not have that little triangle symbol to tell you what type of plastic they are made from.

I started making things from plastic caps when I learned that my municipal recycling program only took type 1 plastic bottles with a neck. The problem with throwing in items that are not specified, you can contaminate the recycling to the point where it becomes trash. I wish my municipality took other types of plastic but that is not the case.

I first started collecting plastic caps from work colleagues for a program run by the beauty products company Aveda. That program does not exist anymore, although they do take back their own packaging.

Today you can take your plastic caps to Whole Foods for the Gimme 5 Program (<http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/blog/whole-story/small-steps-add-gimme-5-recycling>). I have been taking type 5 plastic to Whole Foods for at least a decade. This is the type of plastic in yogurt or sour cream containers.

The Gimme 5 program is offered in partnership with Preserve, a company that makes toothbrushes, razors and housewares from recycled plastic. The type 5 plastic is ground up and turned into plastic pellets, which Preserve transforms into their products. I am a big fan of Preserve products!

Today, I have a plastic cap collection that I use in creative reuse projects. I clean and sort them in shoe boxes by color.

You might think all plastic caps are made from the same type of plastic. That is definitely not the case. For most of my plastic cap crafts, I drill holes in them – and it is a very different experience drilling a cap from a milk jug than a soda bottle. Some caps are very soft and can even get wrapped around a drill bit. Others are super hard and you have to hold them in place for a long time.

To see the diversity of plastic caps in the world, I recommend the Instagram account [https://www.instagram.com/pet\\_diversity/](https://www.instagram.com/pet_diversity/) - PET Diversity – As of today, they have more than 300 photos of plastic caps and they are all different. They are from all over the world and many languages. I have some caps not in their collection.

Something funny about collecting trash material – over time you notice what is common and what is rare. Like stamp collecting, I start putting extra value on caps that are unusual colors. So for example, the most common colors of caps are black, white, gray and red. Any other color gets more interesting. I get very impressed by pink, peach and purple caps, or caps that have an imprint in them. I have some caps that are orange with an imprint of orange slices.

I am drawn to plastic caps because they are so colorful. People recognize them unlike other types of trash you might incorporate into creative reuse projects. And people are not shy about collecting them unlike some other types of trash.

I put this in an Instagram post once, but when I wash my caps and lay them to dry on towels, I feel like a fisherman or a farmer harvesting my goods and preparing them for market.

Next I'll tell you about crafts I have invented using plastic caps.

My first plastic cap crafts were **animal-themed crafts**. The first idea was called caper-pillars and I mentioned that in previous podcast (<http://trashmagination.com/preparing-plastic-caps-for-recycled-crafts/>). This is a craft designed for smaller children to work on fine motor skills. I just drill caps down the center, and the kids practice putting a string through the center. The fun is designing the color scheme.

I also made a bunny and a frog craft, and my husband designed a sock monkey (<http://trashmagination.com/making-animal-toys-from-plastic-caps/>). I take pride in drilling the caps and using shopping bag handles to make a "spine" for the crafts rather than relying on glue which almost always fails. The spine also gives the final toy more flexibility for creative play. Finally, I designed a giant squid from red plastic caps for my nephew who was really into squids at the time (<http://trashmagination.com/octopus-or-squid-made-from-plastic-caps/>).

Building on those ideas, I designed a way to make **pose-able people** from plastic caps. The first ones were hockey players for my daughter's birthday party (<http://trashmagination.com/hockey-player-from-plastic-caps/>). I made a video of how to make people from plastic caps (<http://trashmagination.com/make-people-crafts-from-plastic-caps/>). Later I adjusted the design to make a taiko player or Japanese drummer for my taiko group (<http://trashmagination.com/taiko-crafts-from-recycled-plastic-caps-and-wine-corks/>).

Next, I wanted to test the idea of whether I could make **a sphere or globe** from plastic caps. If I could attach caps side-by-side, would they stand up in a spherical shape? I made a Halloween costume where I was Atlas, the Greek Titan who held up the earth (the cosmos, but it is often represented as the earth). This took a lot of time. It was back when I had only a hand-held drill (now I have a drill press). I held the caps together with twist ties. I would drill each cap sometimes 10 times to get it all to hold together (<http://trashmagination.com/making-a-globe-from-plastic-caps/>).

The concept of a sphere did not work – it caved in and resulted in a lumpy globe. If all the caps were the same size, it might have worked. Also, the twist ties would loosen over time. If I used cable ties, it might have held more tightly as well. For the purposes of the Halloween costume, it was fine, but it was not impressive enough as a globe.

Other fun facts about this project:

- I used white Coca Cola plastic caps with polar bears on them that I made into the Arctic ice cap
- Light blue and brown are not actually the easiest colors to find – so there were some green caps too.

The final plastic cap craft I talked about in my podcast about what to do with old **trophies** – and I mentioned that I designed my own trophies made from yellow plastic caps (<http://trashmagination.com/plastic-cap-trophies/>).

The main lessons I have learned when it comes to plastic cap crafts is that a **drill press** is wonderful and costs less than \$100. My husband **drilled circles into a piece of wood** that fit the caps, so I can drop in the cap to be drilled without endangering my fingers. I like to bring plastic cap activities to tabling events where I want an inexpensive and simple craft to engage event participants – so sometimes I'm drilling hundreds of caps.

For example, a simple activity for toddlers is to take laundry caps and drill two holes in the sides. They put beads on a pipe cleaner and make a little basket (<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/plastic-caps/>). I have seen many toddlers LOVE this activity.

There are so many crafts made from plastic caps. Over the years, I collected almost a hundred pins on Pinterest at <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/plastic-caps/>. People have used them in trashion fashion, mosaics, mandalas, robots, roses, children's games – it's astounding how useful they are.

Finally, I want to mention impressive **artists** I admire who work with plastic caps.

First is Michelle Stitzlein. She wrote two books of projects made from plastic caps. If you are a teacher who wants to try plastic caps in your classroom, she has all the tips on how to do that.

- <http://www.artgrange.com/michellebottlecapart.html>
- <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/ArtGrange>

Next check out Mary Ellen Croteau who makes huge portraits from plastic caps. The first one I saw was called “Close” and it was a self portrait. On her website, she says, “I noticed the smaller caps tended to nest inside one another, and the color combinations reminded me of Chuck Close’s painted portraits.” Her self-portrait contains more than 7,000 plastic caps. <http://www.maryellencroteau.net/bottle-caps>

Next let me introduce you to Lisa Solomon, who has done an exhibit in a few places around the United States called Chroma, where she makes a rainbow of plastic objects on a wall. This is not only plastic caps but also other fun plastic shapes. She just announced that she will be doing a new installation in Washington DC some time in 2017 which makes me super happy because I live here! She is accepting mailed packages of rainbow-colored plastic items – you can get the info at her Tumblr - <http://chroma-installation.tumblr.com/>.

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