



Trashmagination Podcast #9 – Creative Reuse of Old Socks

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

Today's topic is inspired by my friend Alexis Sullivan, who emailed me to say that her husband had just cleaned out a bunch of worn out socks – did I have any suggestions for recycling them or should she just throw them out? She had one idea which was to cut them up and put them out in the woods for animals to use as nesting material.

Regarding the nesting material – I'm not sure about cut up socks. I researched **gardening and bird watching forums** and folks raised the concern about man-made materials in socks, as well as the concern that cotton is not actually a good insulator because it doesn't wick away wetness. But I would think bits of wool socks would be good. Here are the materials that most people recommended for nesting materials:

- String or Yarn (No longer than 3-4 inches)
- Animal or Human Hair
- Straw
- Feathers
- Stuffing from Old Furniture

One person said that dryer lint can become like concrete once it gets wet.

So what can we do with unmatched and worn out socks?

First - reducing the number of unmatched socks. I have a system where I took two plastic milk jugs and I cut off the tops to make buckets – one for dark socks, one for light. Every 6 months, I remove socks just never seem to get matched.

I saw on Pinterest a cute idea which was a board with clothespins where you pin up the unmatched socks. Some people painted the words "Lost Socks" on the board or "Please help me find my match" or other cute sayings.

Now if you have a sock that is definitely unmatched or worn out – what do you do?

My ideas fall into five categories:

1. Use them for cleaning and painting projects
2. Think of them as a strap or band
3. Make smaller socks or mitts for babies
4. Make toys from socks

Let's start with **cleaning, painting and home care projects**.

- duster you can slide on your hand – good for little kids home project
- fuzzy socks can be slid over your Swiffer to make a reusable Swiffer pad
- painting projects in that you can slide a sock over your shoes to ensure you don't get paint drips on the shoes. You could also put socks on things that might get drips like door knobs.
- fill a long sock with rice to make a draft protector to put along the bottom of your door or window

Next is using socks as a **strap or a band**.

- On Pinterest, people cut off the toe of the sock and slide them up their arm as a band. Then they can slide in their phone or other music device.
- cut up socks into circles and use like a rubber band – for example to keep a small box closed. They work better than rubber bands because they don't dry up and crack over time.
- On Pinterest - people make a doughnut shape and wrap their pony tail around them to get a very nice bun shape. It gives their hair an appearance of being thicker if you match the sock color to the hair color.

The next idea is to make **smaller socks or mittens from old socks**.

- Sew into little socks or mitts for your baby (<http://madebyjoel.com/2011/04/diy-baby-socks.html>)
- Sew socks into fingerless gloves if you work in a cold office (<http://www.instructables.com/id/Socks-into-Fingerless-Gloves/>)
- Another way to keep warm is to make homeopathic hot pads that you fill with rice or buckwheat and re-heat in the microwave – you can even add a few drops of essential oils – I read a tip that you should put a cup of water in the microwave when heating these pads if you microwave for more than 2 minutes
<http://www.lilblueboo.com/2012/01/diy-homeopathic-hot-packs-a-tutorial.html>
- Make tiny stockings for an advent calendar or other Christmas decorations if you have colorful socks
<http://www.domesblissity.com/2011/12/baby-sock-advent-calendar.html>

Finally, there are **many toys you can make for kids and pets** – the obvious is a sock puppet, but you can also make:

- Bean Bags (<http://www.alittletipsy.com/2010/05/cute-bean-bags-from-worn-out-socks.html>)
- Hobby Horses (<http://blackbirdstyle.blogspot.se/2011/12/old-socks.html>)
- Sock Doughnuts (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5xSTz-KbWU>)
- Barbie clothes (<http://michkascreativesolutions.blogspot.com/2012/02/tutorial-upcycle-socks-into-barbie.html>)
- Rainbow bubble snake (<http://www.housingaforest.com/rainbow-bubble-snakes/> - take a plastic bottle – the kind with a lid that comes to a point – like you lift and lower a lid. Cut off the bottom. Put a sock over one end – then fill with water mixed with dish soap & food coloring & maybe glycerin for more bubbles. Then you blow through the top of the water bottle & it makes colorful bubble arches.
- Sock Sloth – a popular variation on the sock monkey (<https://www.cutoutandkeep.net/projects/sock-sloth-2> & <http://hellocreativefamily.com/diy-sock-sloth-sewing-project/>)
- Socktopuses and many other plush animals - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bI3va_VH9-E
- Pusheen plush - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0ZqN1XX1xo>

To finish off today's podcast, I want to share a story about creative reuse of socks. I used to organize green lifestyle tours for an organization called the Family Nature Summits. The Summit is held in a different beautiful place every year. I would research the area and look for green innovators. Then I would organize a tour that visited innovators in their homes, businesses and studios.

In 2009, the tour was near Glens Falls, New York, an hour north of Albany. We visited the weaving studio of Hilary Cooper-Kenny called Crazy as a Loom. She wove many types of recycled fiber, but one of her materials was old socks. She had worked out an arrangement with a sock factory called Solmates to take imperfect socks. Solmates are colorful socks and they sell their socks unmatched. Hilary had a cottage industry with local artisans who would cut up the imperfect socks and loop them into chains so they could be woven on a loom into rugs. She doesn't offer those rugs anymore, but I have made rugs from sock loops on my looms and it's a lot of fun.

One more note – when you go buy new socks to replace your old ones – remember that socks are often the item that homeless shelters need the most – so buy an extra set and donate it to your local shelter.

So until next time – May you see your trash as just another source of art – and toy sloths! - in your life.