



Trashmagination Podcast #21 – Scrap Wood

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

In today's episode, let's talk about scrap wood. I'm not much of a carpenter, so I haven't done THAT many wood-based projects, but I have become more comfortable with power tools over the years. Lately my neighbors have been throwing out lots of very tempting looking wood, which got me thinking about this source of trash.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, wood makes up about 6 percent of the waste stream¹. A lot of that wood comes from construction sites, but that's not the only source.

Great Sources of Scrap Wood

There are lots of sources of free scrap wood to practice your woodworking skills.

1. **Wooden shipping pallets** – There are so many pallet projects on Pinterest such as small organizer boxes and wood paneling. Some are treated with chemicals to ensure they don't bring insects when shipped across the world. I'll link to a resource that tells you how to decipher the stamps on the pallets. The main thing to remember is to avoid pallets with the letters MB stamped on them because that means they have Methyl Bromide, a powerful insecticide. Another downside of pallets is that they do take work to take apart.
2. **Clementine boxes** – This is a very thin balsa wood that can be great for crafts. You can take the box apart and use the components.
3. **Construction, demolition and renovation projects** – Connect with contractors and ask them to put the scraps to one side, or get permission to look in the dumpster. Safety first – check for nails!
4. **Trash Day** - In my town, many people throw out wood scraps on garbage day and also wood furniture.
5. **Your Garden** – Sometimes you need to trim back woody plants or trees and branches can be a great source.
6. **The Beach** – You might find driftwood, but also regular pieces of lumber wash up on shore.
7. **Hockey Sticks** – Most hockey sticks today are not made from wood but from a composite material. I have some old wooden ones saved for a special project, yet to be determined.
8. **Old Mattresses and Box Springs** – In an earlier episode, I talked about taking apart old beds.
9. **Bamboo** – It's an invasive species. If you cut some down for project, plenty will grow back in its place.
10. **Barns** – Barn board is actually highly prized by many crafters. Of course always ask permission!
11. **Cabinet & Furniture manufacturers** – If you take their scraps, they don't have to pay to have it hauled away.
12. **Habitat for Humanity ReStore** – This won't be free, but often you can get bigger pieces, doors and windows.
13. **Freecycle** – You can post a WANTED ad for wood scraps.

¹ <https://archive.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/web/html/>

Trashmagination Scrap Wood Projects

There are simple wood projects you can make even if you are just starting out and don't have a lot of tools. You can see a whole bunch of wood palette project ideas on Trashmagination's Pinterest board. Here are some I have done:

Project #1 – Planter Boxes - We recently decided to take down a section of fence in our backyard that was leaning over. We wanted to bring more light into our yard. The wood in this fence was in good shape. I found a picture on Pinterest of some basic wooden boxes, and I replicated those with the fence wood. You can check out the details in the show notes. We still have wood left from the fence – 6x6 fence posts – so I'm currently collecting ideas for posts.

To make the wooden boxes, I only needed a few power tools – a miter saw to cut the wood and a drill. A miter saw is the type of saw that you slide the wood onto a platform and then pull down on a spinning blade. It's a great tool for someone like me who doesn't do a lot of wood working because it doesn't take up too much space.

Project #2 – Ornament Tree - As I mentioned in past episodes, I play taiko or Japanese drums. I break a few drum sticks each year. I had saved the broken drum sticks because I wanted to make something with them. Last month, I made a small wooden tree to display ornaments. The drum stick pieces were like the tree branches. To make it, I drilled holes in a thin piece of wood that were the same width as the drum sticks.

Project #3 – Block Prints - Most of the time, block printing involves carving down into wood or a rubber tile. I made my block by gluing craft foam to a piece of scrap wood. I then sponged fabric paint on the craft foam, and lay fabric over the foam to make a print. It looked a bit like those prints you might make by cutting shapes into a half of a potato. Block prints are really popular right now because it's not difficult to carve a block, and the prints have a modern aesthetic.

Project #4 – Scavenger Hunt - Speaking of carving into a block, here's a scrap wood project I saw in my community. My family enjoys doing corn mazes in the fall. Have you done one of these? Farmers plant corn in a maze pattern and charge admission for people to find their way through the maze. Our favorite maze has this cool feature – there are stations made from scrap wood throughout the maze. Each station reveals a section of the maze, carved into the wood. When you start the maze, they give you a piece of paper with the outline of the whole maze on it. At each station, you take a crayon and rub over the bumps of the maze map to slowly get a total image of the maze. This is a great way to do any scavenger hunt. It wouldn't have to be a maze. The kids get to interact with the clues by coloring – it could be any type of clue or maybe even letters to reveal a message.

Project #5 – Nail and String Art - This involves taking a piece of wood and perhaps you don't even need to cut it. You then tap in small nails in a design, and then stretch yarn between the nails to make the art. My family did this at Halloween, and we made a design that was a large skull. I'll post photos of it in the show notes. Other cool designs that I have seen recently include:

- DIY Bar in Portland, Oregon [<https://www.diybar.co/>] - offer craft projects you can do while socializing. One project is a map of the United States. You put a red yarn heart in the places that are meaningful to you.
- Agnes in August is a Canadian artist who specializes in Mountain String Art – meaning that all her pieces look like mountains [<http://www.agnesinaugust.com/>].

My Family's More Unusual Scrap Wood Projects

- About 15 years ago, my mom designed a planter box that looked like a sailboat on the waves. She taught it as a class and found all the wood for something like 30 students in the trash.
- My brother-in-law Isaiah takes creative reuse of scraps to the next level. He has gathered an incredible collection of wood in his shed. He uses a scroll saw to cut out elaborate shapes.
- My sister did a scrap wood project with broken rowing shells. She was coaching and noticed old bashed up shells that had been blown by the wind and damaged beyond repair. I helped her cut them into reasonable lengths so she could make bookshelves. I'll put photos of all these projects in the show notes.

Artists I Admire Who Use Scrap Wood

When I think of artists who specialize in scrap wood, I think of Danish artist **Thomas Dambo**. One of his projects recently went viral on social media and it involved a scavenger hunt in parks around Copenhagen. He built giants – huge mythical creatures – hidden under bridges or in the forests. It enticed people to visit more remote parts of their parks.

Every December he hosts an event called Remake Christmas. He builds a temporary wooden house in downtown Copenhagen from scrap wood. People make Christmas gifts such as bird houses or printed shirts. He has taught hundreds of people how to make wooden birdhouses from scrap wood. (<http://thomasdambo.com/works/remake-christmas/>)

Another project he recently shared was called Happy Forest. He built a series of inviting benches in a park with triangle shaped roofs made from recycled billboard vinyl (<http://thomasdambo.com/works/happy-forest/>). Now you know why I want to visit Denmark!

Do you know how Thomas got started? His parents let him tear down a fence, just like we did!

Another scrap wood artist is **Kirsty Elson** [<https://www.kirstyelson.co.uk>]. She lives along the ocean in the UK, and she is a driftwood artist. She specializes in creating scenes of coastal towns. Often the wood has bits of paint on it. She incorporates metal too, like nails as chimneys. I love how part of her artistic process is walking on the beach, finding materials. I'll share a video explaining how she makes her creations in the show notes.

When we think of scrap wood, mostly we think of cut lumber, but it can also mean wood like branches or small trees. An artist who works with branches is **Lee Borthwick** in London [<http://www.leeborthwick.co.uk/>]. She cuts branches into circles and hangs them, circle side out, into what she calls “wood tapestries.” She also puts mirrors on the wood.

Zeke Leonard [<http://scfoiw.blogspot.com/>] makes guitars from old pianos. You wouldn't think there are so many old pianos tossed in the trash, but you would be surprised. Zeke is a professor at Syracuse University in the School of Design. Zeke sets up musical instruments made from recycled materials in places where everyone can play them. He teaches people how to dismantle pianos, making banjos from cigar boxes and even how to hang up the guts of a piano in the forest and compose music on it.

Getting Rid of Scrap Wood

When you see all the incredible things that people are making with wood, it makes you wonder why anyone would throw out wood scraps? At the least, can't we have a big bonfire?

If you have a large amount of wood that you need to give away, there are better places to send it than the trash. For example, there is a company called Dakota Timber Company [<https://www.instagram.com/dakotatimberco/>] that specializes in reclaiming wood from people who are deconstructing homes or other projects. Google “reclaimed lumber” in your area.

For smaller pieces, you can donate scrap wood wherever there is a woodshop. My kids attended summer camp at a place called the Kid Museum [<http://kid-museum.org/>] where they were given a bunch of scrap wood and they built whatever they wanted. Camp counselors supervised their use of tools.

Some schools still have woodworking. I'm thinking of the Tinkering School, an educational program in schools around the United States where kids engineer stuff to solve real problems. There are also Maker Spaces.

If you make unusual items from scrap wood, I would love to hear about your projects at trashmagination@gmail.com.

Until next time – may you see trash as just another source of birdhouses and flower boxes in your life.

Additional Resources for this Podcast

- Trashmagination Pinterest Board for Wood Scrap project ideas - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/wood-scrap/>
- Trashmagination Pinterest Board – Projects made for Nature Items including branches - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/nature-items-pinecones-rocks/>
- How do you tell if a wood pallet is safe to use? - <https://www.1001pallets.com/pallet-safety/>
- Wood carving art by my brother-in-law, Isaiah Fraser - <http://trashmagination.com/wood-carving-art-by-isaiah-fraser-from-scrap-wood/>
- Recycling broken rowing shells with my sister Tracy - <http://trashmagination.com/recycling-broken-rowing-shells-into-furniture/>
- Cutting boards from wood scraps - <http://trashmagination.com/making-cutting-boards-from-wood-scrap/>
- What size hole to drill in your bird house - <https://www.thespruce.com/bird-house-hole-sizes-386641>
- Thomas Dambo's giants - <http://www.boredpanda.com/i-have-made-these-6-hidden-giants-and-a-treasure-map-to-show-people-the-beautiful-nature-surrounding-copenhagen/>
- Thomas Dambo Remake Christmas - <http://thomasdambo.com/works/remake-christmas/>
- Thomas Dambo birdhouses - <http://thomasdambo.com/works/christmas-birdtree/>

Wooden Pallet Shops I Like

- Palletables UK - <https://www.etsy.com/shop/PalletablesUK>
- Fernweh Reclaimed Wood (Indiana) - <https://www.etsy.com/shop/FernwehReclaimedWood>

Giants Video

<iframe width="640" height="360" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/NjmR2zueoYg?rel=0" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Remake Christmas Video

<iframe width="640" height="360" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/yZW4EsgwJlo?rel=0" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Happy Forest Video

<iframe width="640" height="360" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/NjRcn2i6prY?rel=0" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Kirsty Elson Video

<iframe src="https://player.vimeo.com/video/55704853" width="640" height="360" frameborder="0" webkitallowfullscreen mozallowfullscreen allowfullscreen></iframe>

<p>Kirsty Elson Designs from Studio Wallop on Vimeo.</p>