



Trashmagination Podcast #30

Advent or Countdown Calendars from Recycled Materials

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

Today let's get inspired to make Advent calendars or countdown calendars from recycled materials. This tradition is perfect for creative reuse enthusiasts because it involves 24 little containers arranged in a beautiful way. The type of containers you use is only limited by your imagination – your Trashmagination!

When I was a kid, my mom made an Advent calendar from a felt evergreen tree, and my siblings and I would take turns pinning felt ornaments on the tree. These calendars are a great way to raise an important idea in our family life, and that is the value of waiting patiently. Here's a story about an important scientific study that has been replicated across cultures around the world related to delaying gratification

[https://www.ted.com/talks/joachim_de_posada_says_don_t_eat_the_marshmallow_yet#t-18027].

A Stanford team studied whether four-year-olds could restrain themselves from eating a marshmallow. They told the each child that if she or he were willing to wait fifteen minutes, they could get two marshmallows. Two out of three kids ate the marshmallow immediately. The ones who waited tried many techniques to wait, including going to the corner of the room, turning their back on the marshmallow, smelling the marshmallow, picking their nose etc. They did a follow-up study fifteen years later and they found that the kids who could delay eating the marshmallow ended up being far more successful in all areas of life.

I believe that a lot of trash is caused by our inability to delay gratification. We generate trash by buying things that are packaged for convenience. If we bought the ingredients and made it ourselves, we would often produce a lot less trash. But as parents, we can do activities that show our kids how to wait patiently, like these calendars. It's like we are showing them how to hold off on eating the marshmallow.

When we make Advent and countdown calendars, we get to enjoy the anticipation of making the calendar, filling it with goodies, and then not opening every pocket or every door all at once. This activity also teaches kids how three and a half weeks *feels*. They learn about time and being mindful about time passing, which is another great life lesson.

I am a fan of calendars that don't involve buying gifts or candies because that typically leads to more garbage. I prefer calendars that increase collaboration rather than consumption. Another advantage of collaborative calendars is that you don't have go out and buy a bunch of candies or small gifts each year. You just pull out the calendar and off you go. I found many ideas that encouraged family members to get creative, which I will share.

I put together a Pinterest board of Advent or countdown calendar from recycled materials

[<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/advent-calendar-holiday-countdown/>]. Most calendars were made from five commonly available items.

The first type is a fabric calendar. A lot of these calendars not using recycled fabric, but they could. We all have t-shirts and bedsheets we don't use anymore. I would also like to make some of these designs with juice pouches or flexible food packaging – any trash type that can be sewn together.

These calendars usually involve simple straight-line sewing to make 24 pockets or bags - Just Crafty Enough [<http://www.justcraftyenough.com/2012/06/the-advent-calendar-project/>]. In one case, the pockets were made from denim pockets from jeans – Pillar Box Blue [<https://www.pillarboxblue.com/jeans-pocket-handmade-advent-calendar/>].

Another material that seems to inspire advent calendars is toilet paper rolls. Usually it involves wrapping the rolls with tissue paper and then arranging the tubes in a shape such as a square, a long row or even a star.

- <http://www.ohohblog.com/2012/11/advent-calendar-calendario-navideno.html>.
- <https://www.lacourdespetits.com/bricolage-en-rouleau-de-papier-toilette-calendrier-de-l-avent/>
- <http://krokotak.com/2013/11/christmas-advent-candy-calendar/>.
- <https://www.coffeeandvanilla.com/cardboard-tubes-christmas-calendar/>

Instructables had a toilet paper calendar with the rolls hanging on a clothesline with streamers hanging down [<http://www.instructables.com/id/Recycled-Toilet-Roll-Advent-Calendar/>].

A nifty fact about toilet paper rolls is that they don't have to be round tubes. I saw an advent calendar where the rolls were flattened and arranged in a snowflake shape – Krokotak [<http://krokotak.com/2017/11/christmas-calendar-snowflake/>]. The same designer made an advent calendar from toilet paper rolls that was a castle, where each roll was a turret with a number on it filled with candies [<http://krokotak.com/2015/11/christmas-advent-calendar-the-castle/>]. And the next year she made a forest where the toilet paper rolls were tree trunks and you remove the top of the tree to get the candies [<http://krokotak.com/2016/11/christmas-calendar-3/>]. For these projects, she involved her children in painting the castle and the forest. I could imagine these calendars as being really collaborative – where maybe you create all 24 castle turrets or trees with your kids, but then each day you add one item to a display area. This way the castle is built or the forest is planted. I remember seeing advent calendars where you add one character per day to a manger scene as well.

As a variation on toilet paper rolls, I saw calendars made with individual yogurt packaging – Les Cours des Petits [<https://www.lacourdespetits.com/bricolage-de-noel-calendrier-de-l-avent-avec-pots-yaourts/>].

Match Box Calendar – I saw an extraordinary advent calendar called the Christmas Calendar House. It looked like a little house with six drawers on each side, adding up to 24 drawers. These drawers were made from matchboxes - The Messy Crafter [<http://themessycrafter.blogspot.com/2011/12/matchbox-advent-calendar-and.html>].

The magazine Country Living featured a match box calendar where the boxes are stacked in the shape of a tree – with a wider base going up levels until there is just one box at the top [<http://www.countryliving.com/diy-crafts/tips/g907/craft-ideas-for-christmas-decorations-1209/?slide=15&click=pp>].

I saw a project where the boxes were attached to panel in the shape of a book – Le Scrap de Manou [<https://manouscrap.com/2017/02/13/calendrier-de-l-avent/>].

I saw a calendar where little toy reindeer carried the matchboxes on their backs – Baballa [<http://baballa.com/2014/11/25/ideas-calendario-adviento/>].

Any little boxes could work for these projects, including CD cases or Altoid tins – as long as you can gather 24 – Sassy Crafter [<http://www.instructables.com/id/Altoids-Advent-calendar/>].

Scrap Wood Tree Calendar – This involves making a very simple tree shape with one vertical piece of wood and then five horizontal pieces of wood. All together it forms a triangle shape - The DIY Dreamer [https://thediydreamer.com/diy/wall-mounted-advent-calendar/#_a5y_p=4435336]. Along the horizontal pieces of

wood are 24 baggies hanging from hooks. She purchased the baggies but if you like sewing, it would be a great way to use up scrap fabric. She stenciled numbers on the bags with fabric paint.

I saw a variation of this project made from palette wood. She replaced the little baggies with cans decorated with wallpaper scraps or paint. She put tissue paper in the cans to hide the gifts.

[<http://ptitedecodelolo.canalblog.com/archives/2013/11/23/28496448.html>].

Holiday Card Calendar – Here's a great way to reuse the art from your favorite holiday cards. Craft Nest designed a system that combines fabric and wood trim into a hanging frame [<http://www.craftynest.com/2011/11/recycled-christmas-card-advent-calendar/>]. You slide the cards into the frame and then slide treats behind the cards. There are many calendars that are envelopes hanging from a clothesline and those could be made from holiday cards.

Sock Calendars – The last idea is adorable. If you knit, you could knit up 24 unique socks! – Die Ehefrau [<http://dieehefrau.de/2013/11/09/advent-calendar-2014/>]. My sister did a sock knitting project with my grandmother where they took the little bits of yarn leftover from other projects that were not enough to do a whole pair of socks. You could also make a sock calendar with some of those unmatched socks from your laundry room! Check out my podcast episode 9 about creative reuse of unmatched socks.

Items to Put Inside Advent Calendars

If you design a calendar that involves gifts, what can you put in there that does not result in a lot of waste? If your family likes chocolate, consider fair trade chocolate. There is an advent calendar offered by Divine Chocolate [<http://shop.divinechocolateusa.com/Milk-Chocolate-Advent-Calendar/p/DIV-001071&c=DivineChocolate@Christmas>].

Some calendars focus on inspirational messages. These could be activity coupons for things you might do together, poems, jokes, family recipes, comics or family memories. You could engage a grandparent to share memories from when they were young or their top 24 pieces of wisdom, and put those in the windows.

You could put handmade ornaments inside the pockets that your family members could put up on the family tree – so people are not getting individual gifts, but a family gift.

If you really want to put in physical gifts, here are ideas, depending on how big you make your pockets:

- Tea bags that you can compost after using
- Items that your family member collects such as coins or stamps
- Finger puppets
- Socks – I see Target just started advertising sock advent calendars with Harry Potter and Star Wars themes.
- Craft supplies such as beads, buttons, scissors, erasers, washi tape or punches – a trip to a local craft upcycling center would be a great place to get all the supplies inexpensively while diverting things from landfill
- Soaps, especially made locally
- Sidewalk chalk – you can make your own [<http://www.allyou.com/budget-home/sidewalk-chalk-paint>]
- Crayons in fun shapes – you can melt down old crayons into molds [<https://doitandhow.com/2012/01/15/crayon-heart-valentines/>]
- Reindeer poop (chocolate covered raisins)
- Musical items such as wind instrument reeds, harmonicas, shakers, castanets or guitar picks
- Cookie cutters
- Pin cushions
- Emergency items such as a small flashlight, mini first aid kits or mini sewing kits

So Thanks for Listening!

I would love to see any advent calendars that you make from recycled materials. You can message me via Instagram or Facebook, or email trashmagination@gmail.com.

Until next time – may you see trash as just another source of celebration in your life.