



Trashmagination Podcast #31 - Christmas Trees from Recycled Materials

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

Today our topic is Christmas trees. At the end of the podcast, I'll talk about the usual discussion of the environmental impact of Christmas tree farms versus purchasing reusable plastic trees. But that's not my focus - I want to talk about how to make Christmas trees from recycled materials. I will share ideas of how to make Christmas trees from lots of creatively reused materials including wood, cardboard, plastic, metal and fabric. And I'll also give examples of Christmas trees that were made from unexpected items that you are less likely to replicate, but they are cool! I put together a Pinterest board of these tree designs [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/christmas-trees-from-recycled-materials/>] which includes:

- 1) a full-sized tree where you put gifts underneath,
- 2) flat trees that hang on a wall or a door,
- 3) smaller trees for a table-top,
- 4) hanging ornaments shaped like Christmas trees

You know how much I love community events that encourage creative reuse, so I got the idea for this podcast when I heard about an event in the Philippines which was to make Christmas trees from recycled materials [<http://cotabato.gov.ph/news/christmas-trees-made-of-recycled-materials-amaze-spectators-at-the-provincial-capitol/>]. What a cool event to replicate! If you wanted to host such an event – or at least you wanted to make your own Christmas trees from recycled materials – where could you begin?

Let's start with scrap lumber. Many companies make wooden Christmas trees. (Of course all trees grown from the ground are wooden, but I mean trees made from lumber.) Most of these companies are not making trees from scrap lumber, but their designs can be a great source of inspiration if you want to make your own. These trees tend to look like flat pieces of wood that spin around a center pole, or dowels that stick out from that center pole. These companies are in Australia, Austria, Denmark and the United States.

- Aribombari - https://www.etsy.com/listing/560042796/medium-size-wooden-christmas-tree-from?ref=shop_home_active_1.
- OneTwoTree - <http://onetwotree.com.au/>
- Design Wien - <https://www.design.wien/>
- Nordic Woodsters - www.nordicwoodsters.dk
- ReTree - <http://www.retreejoy.com/>

It's tricky to make a tree that is three-dimensional where you can hang ornaments. But there are lots of tree designs that are flat and act as decorations against the wall. Check out many creative approaches on my Pinterest board. Some look easy to build and some look like they require more advanced skills and tools.

- Little House of Four - <http://www.littlehouseoffour.com/2014/12/large-rustic-pallet-christmas-tree.html>
- The Thinking Closet - <https://www.thinkingcloset.com/2014/12/08/diy-rustic-pallet-christmas-tree-silhouette-giveaway/>

- Shanty 2 Chic - <http://www.shanty-2-chic.com/2015/11/diy-pallet-christmas-tree.html>
- Affirmaison - <http://www.affirmaison.com/2012/11/our-pallet-christmas-tree.html>
- Redhead Can Decorate - <http://redheadcandecorate.com/2014/11/pallet-christmas-tree/>
- Zolea – triangle tree - <http://zolea.be>

If you only have a four long pieces of scrap wood but have access to cardboard boxes, check out a video by Thomas Dambo in Denmark. He has a very entertaining video – only 1.5 minutes – about how to make a Christmas tree from recycled cardboard. First he builds a trunk from scrap wood. It looks like four poles sticking up out of a pallet. Then he puts long strips of cardboard in the gaps, alternating in various directions, and pushing them down until they are tight. The cardboard strips get shorter as you get to the top. Check out the video!

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/OQ66YGkfxmw" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Thomas hosts a holiday event called Remake Christmas [<http://thomasdambo.com/works/remake-christmas/>] where he invites folks into a cozy house made from recycled materials where they make holiday gifts, so check that out as well.

A different type of wood that can be used to make Christmas trees is driftwood. Caroline Beghin-Kircher makes all sorts of marine-themed art from driftwood. She drills long skinny pieces of driftwood in the middle and then puts them on a post in all directions. She makes ornaments from natural and handmade items. Yesterday she also posted a tree she made from old fishing poles with bobbers for ornaments.

- Driftwood tree - https://www.instagram.com/p/BbURkwCgUlq/?taken-by=made_by_cbk
- Fishing pole tree - https://www.instagram.com/p/BcBCKtoABmj/?taken-by=made_by_cbk

Next let’s talk about Christmas trees from plastic waste. The first idea is making a tree from PVC pipe scraps. Maybe you know a plumber or can access a construction dumpster to can get PVC pipe ends. A website called PVC Fittings Online gives a step-by-step tutorial [<https://www.pvcfittingsonline.com/resource-center/pvc-christmas-tree/>]. They attach pipes all about 5-6 inches long to a piece of board. You can’t hang your ornaments but you put them inside the pipes. Maybe you could also add hooks for hanging ornaments.

Christmas trees can be made from green soda bottles. There are great examples on my Pinterest board. For a really impressive example, it’s worth checking out a giant Christmas tree made in the town of Kaunus (cow-nass), Lithuania by the artist Jolanta Šmidtienė in 2011. It was made from 40,000 green soda bottles [<http://www.galerijabalta.lt/projektai/smaragdine-kaledu-egle-2011/>].

You can make a table-top Christmas tree, by cutting the green plastic bottles into panels. You then cut many small fringes to represent the pine or fir needles. These can flare out with a bit of heat from a hair dryer or a candle. I’ll embed video tutorial in the show notes.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/Oi80zmARkFY" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Another tutorial shows how you can stack many bottles on top of each other to make the layers of an evergreen tree.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/4pM3cfkeBxI" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

If you like to crochet, I’ll post a Youtube video showing how to crochet cute little green covers for plastic caps, and then arranged them on a cone.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/PKc3YxMOS4M" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

If you'd like to make ornaments that look like tiny Christmas trees, I recommend green plastic caps or green buttons. I made one for a decoration-making contest at work. This involved stacking green caps from big to small and then drilling a hole down the middle so they could stack. If you want to use buttons, you need quite a button collection! If you don't want to collect green buttons, lots of Etsy sellers make button tree ornaments.

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/571612343/pretty-amazing-button-tree-decoration>.

Next let's look at Christmas trees made from recycled metal items. You can find intriguing metal shapes at antique shops or yard sales that specialize in vintage trinkets. Tuula MacPhee from Thrifty Rebel Vintage made trees from:

- Round metal baking pans or "tart tins" - <https://thriftyrebelvintage.com/2016/12/repurposed-christmas-tart-tin-tree.html/>
- Two old hand saws - <https://thriftyrebelvintage.com/2015/12/repurposed-hand-saw-tree.html/> - She puts saws together with the pointy teeth sides out – This is kind of a scary-looking tree if you have kids, but still a cool idea.
- Folding ruler - <https://thriftyrebelvintage.com/2015/11/folding-ruler-christmas-tree.html/> - She makes a triangle shape from the ruler and attaches it to a frame, then adds small ornaments.

Another artist who makes Christmas trees from vintage items Carline from Organized Clutter. Her projects involve:

- Rolling pins, arranged from small to large - <http://www.organizedclutter.net/2014/03/hanging-my-rolling-pins.html>
- Metal funnels – <http://www.organizedclutter.net/2013/12/rustic-funnel-christmas-trees.html>

Other metal household items that make great Christmas tree decorations are:

- Metal rakes – You can take one rake to make something like a wreath, or put multiple rakes hanging one-above the other to make a tree. – HomeTalk - <https://www.hometalk.com/6049409/how-to-make-a-christmas-tree-from-a-rake>
- Ladders – I saw lots of people open up their eight-foot ladder and wrap it in trees and tinsel.

Next let's talk about Christmas trees from recycled fabric. My mom makes table-top Christmas trees from recycled wool blankets and clothing. They are called wool feather trees [<http://threesheepstudio.blogspot.com/2014/12/wool-feather-trees.html>]. I will link to a video tutorial so you can see how she makes them.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/Eo1dYNrql2g" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

I am also a fan of Christmas trees made from recycled wool sweaters. Ellen Baker from The Long Thread has a tutorial for how she prepares the 32 felted circles and sews them together. [<http://thelongthread.com/?p=1656>]

Finally, I want to share Christmas tree ideas that I think are really *out-there* but they were done!

- Cardboard egg cartons painted green – These were arranged in a circle and then another circle piled on top of each other. It looks like it took about 15 layers of egg cartons, and the egg cartons start with a dozen but then get cut down to only four eggs near the top. That would be maybe 150 egg cartons?
- Neckties – I saw a tree made from neckties hanging on a very large cone in a men's clothing store. I have quite a necktie collection from when I made crazy quilts from neckties [<http://trashmagination.com/sewing-crazy-quilts-from-mens-ties/>].
- Lobster Pots – Along the coast of Maine, apparently fisherman are known to stack up their lobster pots in the shape of a tree with buoys as ornaments [<http://ininteractiveinns.blogspot.com/2011/12/lobster-trap-christmas-trees-dot-coast.html>].
- Mussel Shells – A company in the UK called ASHoreThing Creative makes beautiful table-top trees from mussel shells with a dried starfish at the top - <https://www.etsy.com/listing/557548708/mussel-shell-christmas-trees>.
- Green books – Libraries have been known to find books that all have green spines and stack them in a circle. It might be a great use for an encyclopedia collection.

- Bicycles – In 2010, in a place called The Rocks in Sydney, Australia, a company made a giant Christmas tree entirely from recycled bicycles.
- Windows – In a town called Rakvere in Estonia, an artist named Teet Suur has been doing huge Christmas tree installations since 2014. In 2015, the tree was made from 121 windows from old buildings with the panes colored in. It was so beautiful when lit up. You can see a video of the installation in the show notes.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/LOnLIEHSfgQ" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Christmas Tree Farms versus Plastic Trees

Now before we end, I just want to touch on the discussion about whether to buy a tree from a Christmas tree farm or whether to buy a plastic tree and reuse it each year. A 2012 study found that the environmental impact of these two choices were about the same [<https://stateimpact.npr.org/texas/2012/12/13/real-vs-artificial-christmas-trees-an-easier-choice-than-you-think>]. The lights you choose to put on your tree have a bigger impact than the tree, so choose LED lights. Also, there is a company that makes trees from recycled plastic called Oncoor [<https://www.oncoortrees.com/sustainability1.htm>].

Another option for people in northern California or Oregon is to rent a live Christmas tree from a company who will then pick them up in January!

- Living Christmas Trees in Torrance, California - <https://www.livingchristmas.com/>
- Rent a Living Christmas Tree in San Francisco, California - <https://www.rentxmastree.com/shop/rent.html>
- Original Potted Christmas Tree Company in Oregon - <http://pottedchristmastrees.org/>

If you are curious what my family does – I have a plastic tree that I got for free through Freecycle about ten years ago. I felt like that was a good option because I saved this tree from landfill. I am a members of a group in my town called Buy Nothing Reston where people post items they don't need anymore and I have seen a lot of Christmas decorations getting shared this way. So check if you have a Buy Nothing group in your town or consider starting one. I am impressed how everything seems to find a home.

So Thanks for Listening!

I would love to see any Christmas trees 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 the Christmas spirit in your life.