



Trashmagination Podcast #96 – Creative Reuse While Social Distancing

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. I have been struggling to make an episode because of all the events around coronavirus. You have a lot on your minds and it's enough each day to keep everyone clean and fed. Creative reuse might be the last thing you are thinking about. But I decided to make an episode because I know some people are looking for activity ideas. Plus it can be comforting to hear the voices of people who have become familiar through podcasts. I have found that myself as I listen to my regular podcasts. Even though we are social distancing, I hope you know my heart goes out to you and I feel connected with you.

Today's episode is about 10 creative reuse activities that you can likely do without having to leave your home. These are activities I have talked about in previous podcast episodes, but I'm gathering them here into one episode. These are activities that you could do with items that you likely already have at home so you don't need to go to the store, which is my goal all the time but especially right now.

If you are inspired to try these activities, I recommend you go listen to the original episode because in each episode I talk about artists who use that material in their work. That would allow you to expand the activity into a larger art lesson where you see videos about creative reuse artists.

1. Plastic Milk Jug Suncatchers

Episode 1 of Trashmagination is about creative reuse of plastic milk jugs which is a common item in the United States but not all countries. This is a wonderful craft material. The milk jug plastic can be cut with most scissors. You print templates designed by the blogger Filth Wizardry of butterfly species. You then cut up the cleaned milk jugs and I share a video about how I cut my milk jugs. Then you put the templates behind the plastic milk jugs which are usually translucent. You trace around the butterfly shape and then cut it with regular scissors. You can decorate the butterfly wings in colors and designs based on how they appear in nature or you can design your own butterfly. If you are not into butterflies, you can cut out whatever shapes interest you such as cars, horses, leaves, birds, cats etc. You'll just need to find some clip art online for whatever you enjoy. I recommend using permanent markers to color your suncatchers because the washable kind just rubs off the plastic. If you are working with small children, this will require wearing an apron or adult t-shirt to protect their clothing and you'll want to keep an eye on them so they don't start drawing on themselves or the table.

2. Wall Hooks Made from Recycled Trophies

Here's the type of project that you put on your wish list but you never find time to complete, but since we are stuck at home, this is a good time to do it! In episode 4 of Trashmagination, I talked about creative reuse of trophies. If you have a piece of scrap wood and trophies, you unscrew the portion of the trophy that is the person doing the sport or the star or whatever ornamentation is on top. Then you attach them to a rectangular piece of scrap wood to make wall hooks. This idea was from the blog Design Sponge - <https://www.designsponge.com/2011/05/diy-project-vintage-trophy-coat-rack.html>. You will need a power drill and typical drill bits. The only unusual item you need is called a Forstner bit which is a drill bit that makes a circle on the back of your wood so the washer and nut are hidden inside the wood. I was going to make this project but then I actually found a teacher who wanted all our trophies as classroom awards, so you might first try giving them away on your local Buy Nothing group. In my episode about creative reuse of trophies, I also talk about how to make your own trophies by upcycling plastic caps rather than buying new trophies – so check that out!

3. Wine Cork Mat

If you have been saving wine corks, you could tackle a project from episode 6 to make a bath mat from wine corks. I made my mat in 2013 and it is still working although I have repaired the corners a few times by re-tying the corks to the rubberized mat. This is also in my guest bathroom where it gets less wear and tear than in the bathroom I use every day. But it's a fun project and one that could keep you busy during social distancing. One thing I wish I had known was that it is easier to cut the corks in half if you boil them first.

4. Sock Doughnuts

Episode 9 was about creative reuse of socks. You can use mis-matched socks in cleaning projects but if you are looking for fun ways to engage your kids, there are many toys you can make from socks. One of my favorite is to make doughnuts and then you can pretend to open a bakery [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5xSTz-KbWU>]. These doughnuts also function as pin cushions or as an item that you can use to make a hair bun. You can also make miniature doughnuts from the fingers of gloves which the kids can hang from their backpacks or put on the ends of their pencils.

5. Sit-Upon from Flexible Food Packaging

Episode 15 was about making items from flexible food packaging like juice pouches which is made from thick plastic but it bends like fabric. A lot of food is sold in this packaging instead of plastic or glass bottles. It may seem surprising but this packaging can be sewn with a regular sewing machine. I made so many things from this type of packaging but especially gift bags. You can sew in a zipper to make a pencil case. You can see example projects in my show notes for how I creatively reuse this type of packaging but I think a great starter project is to make a sit-upon, which is an insulated rectangle that you can carry on hikes and keep your bottom warm when you sit down. You can make this project with a sewing machine or by putting duct tape on the four sides. You can provide insulation between the layers of flexible food packaging with old towels. This could be a good project to do with your kids and then you can go out and have a picnic to get fresh air during this time of social distancing. You can also make a wipe-able placemat for toddlers.

6. Nail and String Art

Episode 21 was about creative reuse of scrap wood. Here's a great project for older kids and teens. They can make nail and string art. You get any size piece of wood and then draw out a pattern with a pencil. It could be something simple like a heart. In the show notes from this episode, I show how we made a really big piece of nail and string art which was a huge skull for our Halloween decorations. Then you tap in a whole bunch of small nails along the outline of this shape. Next you weave back and forth some string or yarn to fill in the shape. What's nice about this project is that you can use just about any wood and any string. You can draw any shape that you like. It could be relevant to an upcoming holiday to become part of your decorations for that holiday. While you are making this piece, you can watch videos about Thomas Dambo who makes incredible sculptures all around the world from recycled wood pallets.

7. Secret Messages with White Crayons and Homemade Watercolor Paint

Episode 22 was about creative reuse of crayons and markers. There are SO many easy creative reuse ideas in this episode and it's a great way to declutter your crayons and markers. Here's a quick project idea that uses up white crayons and markers that are running out of juice – which are both items that can be tricky to use up. You can write a secret message on a piece of paper with the white crayon, and then you can make watercolor paint by soaking defunct markers in water. Then you paint over the white crayon and the message appears. Also, keep those colorful plastic caps from the markers. They make great beads if you drill a hole in one end.

8. Taking Apart Broken Appliances

Here's an activity to keep older kids busy – have them take-apart broken appliances. In Episode 24, I give lots of tips on how to run a take-apart event, and you can do it at home today. When you take apart broken items, it means you are

more likely to be able to recycle the components if you can separate plastic from metal for example. Plus it is a great way to talk about how things are made with your kids.

9. Dollhouse Furniture from Recycled Materials

Episode 34 is one of the most popular episodes of Trashmagination. It's about making dollhouse furniture from recycled materials. The nice thing about this episode is that it has lots of project ideas, so maybe you don't have 300 wine corks, but you likely do have a few of each item and that's all you need to make dollhouse furniture. Here are some of my favorite ideas from this episode:

- a washing machine from a shampoo bottle that actually washes clothes
- pretend glass bottles made from defunct holiday light bulbs.
- doll-sized dishes from blister packs of medication
- hardwood flooring from Popsicle sticks
- miniature food made from recycled junk mail

10. Monsters from Recycled Materials

In Episode 37, I talked about making monsters from recycled materials. This was a lesson plan that I delivered to a high school class that was reading Frankenstein. So if you are looking for a more open-ended activity idea, check out this podcast episode. You could also make robots from recycled materials – but the examples that I share in this episode are all monsters.

11. Pet Toys from Toilet Paper Rolls

It is difficult to find toilet paper in the stores these days, but once people use up the toilet paper, there will be a lot of cardboard rolls. In Episode 38, I share lots of ways to make items for your pets including pet toys. One of the projects involved making a puzzle for your cat from 150 toilet paper rolls. You can also build structures for smaller pets like hamsters from toilet paper rolls.

12. Personal Hygiene with Recycled T-Shirts

Speaking of toilet paper, one way that people have been conserving toilet paper is by adding a bidet to their toilet and wiping dry with small towels. You can make those small towels from recycled t-shirts. Even if you are not ready to make that change in your personal hygiene, recycled t-shirts can be made into great facial wipes, tissues and feminine products. You can get tutorials on how to sew these very simple projects in my show notes for episode 41.

13. Miniature Paintings on Dried Tea Bags

This is a stressful time and it's important that we all find ways to relax. One idea is to drink herbal teas such as chamomile. But unless you use loose tea, you will end up with a tea bag. I used to think that I could toss tea bags into my composter, but then I learned that most tea bags contain plastic. So in episode 43, I share ideas for what you can do with your used tea bags. You can put the grounds in your garden, but then what to do with the bags? One idea is to let them dry and then use them for miniature painting projects inspired by artists such as Ruby Silvius who wrote a book called *363 Days of Tea* which features her teabag paintings over the course of a year. Each painting is influenced by the shape of the teabag. You could even host a miniature art show inspired by the Instagram account called Tiny Art Show [<https://www.instagram.com/tinyartshow/>] which advocates for installing tiny art shows in unexpected places. You could even make tiny frames for your painting from found materials.

14. Shrinky Dink Art from Clamshell Packaging

Episode 51 was about clamshell packaging and by that I mean those clear plastic containers that open like a clamshell that are often used to sell berries or take-out food. This type of plastic is almost never accepted by recycling programs. A great way to creatively reuse it is to make shrinky dink art – meaning art that you draw on the plastic and then bake so it shrinks. If you punch a hole in the art before you bake it, you can make a charm bracelet.

15. Educational Games with Plastic Bread Tags

There are many organizations who collect plastic bread tags and I list them in episode 52. But if you are looking for an educational activity for your kids, one way to creatively reuse bread tags is to write the letters of the alphabet on them. Then have the kids pick up the bread tags by sucking up through a straw to place them into words. This idea comes from the blog Raising Dragons.

16. Lenticular Photo Display from Recycled Wooden Clementine Boxes

Do you have any wooden clementine boxes? If so, check out episode 53 where I showed how to make something called a lenticular photo display using the triangle-shaped corner pieces from those boxes. It's a simple craft and a great way to talk about optical illusions.

17. Fidget Quilts and Crocheted Plastic Bag Mats

This is a more ambitious project but the idea is to make fidget quilts, where are lap-sized quilts with lots of buttons, zippers, pockets or other items someone could manipulate. We make these quilts for people who have dementia to keep their hands busy. Now at this time, it is unlikely that you could bring these quilts to seniors because of the concern that you might pass along the virus with that quilt. But that doesn't mean you can't sew them and have them ready for when it is safe. I talked about fidget quilts and other community service projects related to creative reuse in episode 72. This might be a great way for your kids to earn service hours even if they cannot provide in-person service in the community. It's also a great way to declutter your fabric scraps and notions. Another community service project you could work on from home are mats crocheted from plastic bag yarn.

18. Orange Peel Roses and Banana Peel Bacon

Episode 74 is about creative reuse projects for fruit and vegetable peelings. It is likely that you are cooking at home more than during typical weeks, and so you might produce more peelings. One of the more unusual ideas in this episode is to eat banana peels. I had never heard about this idea but I learned there are many vegan recipes that repurpose banana peels to make meat substitutes similar to pulled pork or bacon. If that sounds too unusual, you can at least dry peels to make teas or make them into crafts. You can make amazing roses from orange peels. You could try carving avocado pits. And I hope you'll check out the work of Yoshihiro Okada who makes animal portraits from citrus peels which he called Orange Origami [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNYcQsvddBk>].

19. Painting with Expired Cosmetics

Did you know that many cosmetics expire in a relatively short period of time? If you listened to episode 77, then you heard all about it. If you have expired eye shadow, it could be a fun project to make a painting with all those colors. In the United Kingdom, there is a company that collects expired eye shadow to make into watercolor paints, but you can do it on a small scale in your own home. One nice thing about this type of paint is that it often has a nice shimmer.

20. Defunct Tennis Ball Games or Cross-Stitch Tennis Racket

It's important to stay active even if you cannot go to the gym or your regular exercise options. You can creatively reuse defunct tennis balls and make games with ideas from episode 80. One game is called Bottoms Up and it involves putting a tennis ball in some panty hose or a long sock, tying it around your waist and then trying to knock down aluminum cans. We played this game at Scouts and it is hilarious. In that episode I also shared ideas for things to make with old tennis rackets. One of my favorite is to cross-stitch a design in the netting.

21. Egg Shell Sidewalk Chalk [BONUS]

Episode 83 was about creative reuse of egg shells and egg cartons. In that episode, I share how to make sidewalk chalk from egg shells. You can also glue tiny pieces of egg shell to make mosaics. There are so many easy crafts to make with egg cartons – I hope you will check out that episode if you have small children. Where we live, the stores are sold out of eggs so I hope you also feel gratitude if you have some near you!

22. Tissue Paper Flowers, Paintings and Toilet Paper Roll Fish [BONUS #2]

Did you know that if you get colorful tissue paper wet, it will leak out dye? It is not true of all tissue paper, but the kind that does leak dye is called bleeding tissue paper. And you can make so many crafts by manipulating wet tissue paper. You can get ideas for easy crafts with tissue paper in episode 94. There is also another toilet paper roll crafts featured in this episode where you can make little fish with tissue paper scales and a toilet paper roll for the body.

Thank you!

So there are 20 fun ideas that you can do from home likely with the materials that you already own during this time of social distancing. Thank you for listening! Please let me know how you are doing creative reuse right now at trashmagination@gmail.com. Be sure to share this podcast episode with your friends who are looking for creative activities to do! I wish you and your family all the best at this time. Until next time, may you see trash as a source of art in your life!