



Trashmagination Podcast #97 – Toilet Paper Rolls and Other Cardboard Tubes

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. Today's episode is about creative reuse of toilet paper and other cardboard tubes, which includes longer ones from paper towels or wrapping paper. These are sometimes called "loo rolls" in the United Kingdom. This episode is inspired by the COVID-19 quarantine which caused shortages of toilet paper and paper towel.

I'll start with creative reuse activities for younger children, then activities for older children and adults, and then I'll end with stories about artists who work with cardboard tubes. You can get more info about everything in the show notes or at the Trashmagination Pinterest board - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/cardboard-tubes/>.

I want to explain why I say toilet paper *tube* instead of toilet paper *roll*. I often save toilet paper tubes for crafting. Once when I had too many, I put a notice on Freecycle offering them. After I arranged for someone to pick them up, I found my box on the side of the road. I think the person thought I was giving them full rolls of toilet paper, and when they opened the box, they were probably confused and just left them on the side of the road. That's why now I talk about toilet paper tubes instead of toilet paper rolls - to reduce confusion when I'm discussing creative reuse.

Activities for Younger Children from Cardboard Tubes

So now – let's talk about activities for younger children. On Instagram right now, there is something called The Great Toilet Roll Challenge to encourage crafting with toilet rolls or tubes. This was started by Rebekah from Heart Art Life. You can search the hashtag #thegreattoiletrollchallenge for more ideas and to share your own crafts.

When my children were small, we made **cars** from toilet paper tubes [<https://trashmagination.com/racing-toilet-paper-roll-cars-using-gravity/>]. We attached wheels to the tubes made from plastic caps. For my son's birthday, we had a car race. We have a patio that is one story up from the ground. We took two ropes and hung them down from the patio on a diagonal, anchoring them to the ground with free weights. We would slide the tube cars on the two ropes and after we said, "On your mark, get set, go," the kids would let go of their cars and they would slide down the ropes to the ground while we cheered. Once the cars reached the finish line, my husband would remove them from the ropes and put them in a bucket, which the kids would pull up the bucket and get ready for another race.

That was about 10 years ago. Last year I found those cars in my storage. I put them up on my Buy Nothing Group with an explanation of how to race the cars. Another family took the cars along with additional toilet paper tubes and some plastic caps that I drilled for them to make more wheels, and they had a similar birthday party for their child. So that's a cool story about how a recycling project got recycled again.

The next project we did when my kids were small was to make toilet paper tube **binoculars**. We connected two toilet paper tubes with masking tape, and then punched two holes in them so we could attach a strap made of string or yarn. The kids could decorate the binoculars. Then we would go into the woods and look for birds or squirrels. I saw this activity expanded two ways. One time we were at a nature festival, and they had hidden stuffed toys of animals all over in a marked-off area, and the kids were given a checklist of animals to find. If you don't have a bunch of stuffed toys that look somewhat like realistic animals, another way I did this activity was to prepare photos of animals that I cut out of magazines and put on corrugated cardboard, then placed them throughout a marked-off area in the woods. It's helpful if the checklist is little drawings of animals or clip art rather than just words so non-readers can still play.

If you are planning any special event for children, you can likely find instructions for how to make almost any animal, cartoon character, vehicle or building from toilet paper tubes. There are very cute crafts of Star Wars characters, ocean creatures, horses, dogs, cats, trucks, rocket ships and more. Check out the Trashmagination Pinterest board for many inspiring examples [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/cardboard-tubes/>].

I mentioned one of my favorites in my recent episode about the creative reuse of tissue paper. In Japan each spring, people decorate with carp-shaped windsocks for Children's Day on May 5. A carp is a huge fish and it's chosen as the symbol because it is a fish with a lot of energy which swims upstream. There is an adorable version of a mini carp windsock by Squirrely Minds made from a toilet paper tube and tissue paper [<http://squirrelyminds.com/2013/05/03/koinobori-japanese-flying-carp-diy/>].

Continuing on the theme of Japanese-inspired crafts, I made a kadomatsu from recycled cardboard tubes. This is an arrangement made usually around the New Year and placed outside the front door [<https://trashmagination.com/kadomatsu-from-recycled-materials/>]. It is usually made from bamboo, pine and ume or plum, but I made a version where the bamboo components were made from cardboard tubes while the pine and ume portions were made from cardboard boxes.

Activities for Older Children and Adults

Next I'll share activity ideas for older children and adults. A fun way to teach about outer space and constellations is to make a craft called "**constellation scopes**." You take a piece of paper and use a pin to punch out the designs of constellations. I will link to a PDF which has many of the easier-to-find, well-known constellations already sized to fit on the end of your toilet paper tube [https://www.mos.org/sites/dev-elvis.mos.org/files/docs/education/mos_starlab-k-2_constellation-scopes.pdf]. You then stick the punched out design on the end of the tube, turn out the lights and shine a flashlight into the tube, making the constellation appear on your wall. I think I'll do this activity with my Scouts because they have a requirement for their Second Class rank which says that they need to "demonstrate how to find directions during the day and at night without using a compass or an electronic device." Normally when I do this activity with them, we are outside at night but it would be great practice to make the constellations using these constellation scopes first. If you think the concept of a constellation is too abstract for your child, you could punch out other shapes such as letters of the alphabet or maybe a cat face!

On that theme of outer space, there is a trend where people take their photos through a cardboard tube and then it looks like they are the man on the moon [https://www.instagram.com/p/BooH2xAF_re/! These are called **Moon Selfies**. People also like to take photos of their pets through toilet paper tubes.

A fun way to teach about physics is to make a **maze ball game**. You take a shallow cardboard box and attach cardboard tubes to form tunnels. Then you drop in a marble or a ping pong ball and the player angles the box to get the ball rolling and move it from point A to point B through the tubes [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ay2iNmHgxc>][<https://frugalfun4boys.com/make-ball-maze-hand-eye-coordination-game/>].

To expand on that idea, you can make a **marble chute game** (the word chute is spelled c-h-u-t-e). The artist Nathan Selikoff made a giant marble chute game at the Cardboard Art Festival in Orlando, Florida in 2014 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cf3DrhRZpRY>] [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaTYPlaN6GA>]. He made it easy to move the chutes because he built the game on a peg board, meaning a big board with many small holes on a grid, and then you could move the chutes because they were attached to the board with small clips [<https://nathanselikoff.com/works/giant-marble-chute>]. At home you could make a miniature version on your fridge, attaching magnets to your tubes so you can move the chutes easily. You might want to put a box underneath so the marbles don't roll away as well as rugs to protect everyone's knees. [Share photo from Silver Spring Maker Faire.]

Another project for older kids and adults inspired by Nathan Selikoff is to make a **cardboard tube instrument** [<https://nathanselikoff.com/works/cardboard-tube-instrument>]. The tubes are cut from long to short lengths with a bicycle inner tube on the top. They are standing upright in a stand made from cardboard. He played his instrument with

paddles that look like ping pong paddles. I couldn't find a video of someone playing it, but you can see similar instruments made from PVC pipes.

Those were ambitious projects for older kids and adults but if you are looking for something smaller, a simpler idea is to reuse toilet paper tubes to make **small gift boxes**. You can paint them or cover them with pretty paper. You can reuse toilet paper tubes to make **seed pots** – little tiny pots where you can start your plants until it is warm enough to plant them outside. For the Scout Gardening merit badge, one requirements is to plant 100 seeds and see how many grow. This would be a great way to set up for those 100 seeds, to cut toilet tubes in half and then put them in plastic trays or boxes lined with plastic bags, and fill them with soil.

Another simple creative reuse of a cardboard tube is to make a **speaker for your phone**. You take a tube like a Pringles canister, cut a slit the size of your phone, add some feet to keep it from rolling and voila! The sound of your phone is magnified. I might need to give this a try to increase the volume of my metronome app for when I'm practicing my music! [<https://www.sandytoesandpopsicles.com/craft/make-your-own-smart-phone-speaker-with-a-pringles-can/>]

Artists Who Creatively Reuse Toilet Paper Tubes and Other Cardboard Tubes

So hopefully you now have a lot of ideas for how to creatively reuse your toilet paper tubes and other cardboard rolls. I'll finish today's podcast by talking about six artists who incorporate cardboard tubes into their work.

The first is Junior Fritz Jacquet, an origami artist from France. He makes expressive faces by squishing toilet paper tubes. I found many Youtube videos where people try to replicate his work, often origami enthusiasts, and it is clear that it takes a lot of practice to make a compelling face from a toilet paper tube. You have to really work the cardboard vigorously with your hands to make it supple while also using the strength of the cardboard to hold the shape once you get a good facial expression. On his website, it says "Their earthy appearance is accentuated by a few colored touches of natural pigments which give the paper a metallic appearance." I could have talked about Junior Fritz Jacquet in my recent episode about tissue paper because he also makes sculptures with tissue paper. They even light up from inside, similar to the techniques I mentioned by Papier à Êtres.

- <https://juniorfritzjacquet.com/>, <https://www.instagram.com/juniorfritzjacquet/>
- Interview in French - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9emAN9TPzu0>
- Interview in French - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIWaWv4z-KY>
- <https://www.thisiscoolossal.com/2014/08/toilet-paper-rolls-squished-into-funny-faces-by-junior-fritz-jacquet/>
- Toilet tube face tutorial - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtVLqRa1qHY>

The next artist who works with cardboard tubes is Anastassia Elias who is also from France. She makes tiny scenes inside tubes by cutting tiny shapes and silhouettes with an exacto knife and carefully inserting them in the tubes. She then back-lights them. She did a project in 2010 with an organization called WaterAid where she made 10 tiny cityscapes of well-known cities for World Toilet Day. The goal was to remind us that many people do not have access to toilets which leads to a lot of illness.

- <http://www.anastassia-elias.fr/>, <http://www.anastassia-elias.fr/2017/10/11/rouleaux/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/anastelias/>
- <http://www.amusingplanet.com/2010/09/anastassia-elias-tiny-world-inside.html>
- Promotion for WaterAid project - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Obttx0ebo3Y>
- Tutorial to make a scene inside a cardboard tube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWECGNMuXRE>

For most of the artists I mention in this podcast, I have never seen their work in person, but I did see the work of Yuken Teruya in 2017. It was a paper bag from a fast-food restaurant. He cut out the shape of a tree from the side of the bag and then stood it up inside the bag – making a small world similar to the ones made by Anastassia in the toilet paper tubes. I will share an interview where Yuken talks about how his creative reuse focus started with toilet paper tubes. He was looking at the toilet paper tube and in his mind, he saw the branches of the tree coming out of it. Here's a little side note about this interview. This video came out five days ago, made by a Turkish TV show on artists who work with

recycled materials. It is so cool when I am researching a topic for this podcast and a wonderful new resource pops into my world. That Turkish TV show is called Geri Dönüşen Sanat which translates to mean “Returning Art” or “Recycled Art.” Kudos to director Tunahan İlbars for a wonderful show!

Anyhow, it’s fun to see how Yuken gently manipulates the fragile pieces with long tweezers. He makes pieces with sprouts growing out of newspapers and money. He loves lighting up his pieces to make beautiful shadows. Yuken talks about how he believes the original tree still exists within the fibers of the tube, the bag, the money or the newspaper. With his work, he is pulling out the memory of that tree. He said, “I try to pull the life of the tree out of the paper.” Later he says that he is trying to give life back to the materials, and to remind us that we carry nature in our pockets when we carry these items. I really appreciate his poetic approach to creative reuse.

- <https://www.yukenteruyastudio.com/>, <https://www.yukenteruyastudio.com/projects-1/corner-forest.html>
- Yuken talking about how he works – great interview - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzF5w3gFkgM>
- <https://www.facebook.com/trt2/videos/643313726450959/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-ULIEeJS2J/>
- Interview by the Renwick - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MP5iDnYI7Bk>

Our next cardboard tube art is made by Nituniyo [Ni-TU-Ni-YO], a design and architectural firm in Spain. They made a giant elephant from 6,000 cardboard tubes for a festival in 2015. Nituniyo built the elephant from tubes and then asked festival attendees to write their dreams on pieces of paper that they would push into the tubes. The sculpture was called Somnis de Pes or “Dreams of Weight.” There is a very cool video showing how they built the elephant, which is about the size of a real elephant.

- <http://nituniyo.eu/somnis-de-pes/>
- Video about building the elephant - <https://vimeo.com/128468878>
- Faster video showing how the sculpture was built - <https://vimeo.com/128473741>
- <https://www.demilked.com/recycled-cardboard-tubes-elephant-dreams-weight-nituniyo-spain/>

Next, you know there is a popular game played at bridal showers where you make a dress from toilet paper, and some toilet paper companies sponsor contests to make wedding gowns from toilet paper [\[https://www.today.com/style/meet-10-finalists-year-s-toilet-paper-wedding-dress-contest-t130222\]](https://www.today.com/style/meet-10-finalists-year-s-toilet-paper-wedding-dress-contest-t130222) although I bet that game is not so popular these days with the shortages of toilet paper. But I wanted to find dresses made from the cardboard tubes. I looked through my giant collection of trash fashion images and found a dress made by Bea Szenfeld from Sweden in 2013. She made the dress was made for World Toilet Day to inaugurate a new toilet facility being opened at the Central Train Station in Stockholm. So that was another art piece inspired by World Toilet Day – just like Anastassia Elias’ work. Perhaps I should do something for World Toilet Day next November. I also found a wig made from toilet paper tubes for sale on Etsy.

- Announcement about dress and new toilet facility - <https://news.cision.com/se/jernhusen/r/stockholms--naturligaste--toalett-invigd-pa-stockholms-centralstation,c9499256>
- <https://news.cision.com/se/jernhusen/i/klanning-bea-szenfeld-narbild,c1399871>
- Wig from toilet paper tubes - <https://www.etsy.com/listing/184334346/toilet-paper-tube-wig>

Our last artist who works with toilet paper tubes is Sakir Gökcebag [Sa-KEER GOKE-Seh-BAG]. In his exhibit called Trans-Layers in 2010, he hung toilet paper tubes on the wall in patterns and then draped down the toilet paper in big loops. He also did a piece called Morning Circle in 2013 where he put toilet paper tubes in a circle and filled in all the spaces with red lentils. On Instagram, Sakir notes that his works made from toilet paper have been getting a lot of sharing lately. I mentioned his work in my episode about creative reuse of shoes and really I could probably mention him in almost every episode because he creatively reuses so many every-day materials. On the website for one of his exhibitions, he says, “I am happy because I have found my goal in life very close to me: everyday objects! Art doesn’t always have to be difficult to understand and complicated. Simple works of art can contain a lot. Every object hides potential creativity. As soon as

an object is placed in a different context, it loses its original character and allows new interpretations. It is very easy to philosophize with simple things.”

- <https://sakirgokcebag.com/>, <https://www.instagram.com/sakirgokcebag/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/B914OeioKT5/> -
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7IHLnhoX3o/> - Morning Circle, 2013
- <https://mymodernmet.com/sakir-gokcebag-trans-layers/>
- <http://www.boredpanda.com/toilet-paper-art-sakir-gokcebag/>

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Please let me know how you creatively reuse cardboard tubes at trashmagination@gmail.com. I wish you and your family all the best at this time. Until next time, may you see toilet paper tubes and other cardboard tubes as a source of art in your life!