



Trashmagination Podcast #39 – Fruit Stickers

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

Today we're talking about fruit stickers. I got the idea while following the Instagram account of Genny Rietze [Reets], a zero waste enthusiast in Alaska. Her account is Hellozerowaste. All through 2018, she needs people to send fruit stickers so she can make a wearable art project. I'll post her address. She suggests you put the stickers on wax paper to make it easier for her to unstick them.

Genny Rietz, PO Box 28, Haines, AK 99827

I heard more about fruit stickers from the TED Radio Hour podcast episode called The Power of Design [<https://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/478560031/the-power-of-design>]. The host Guy Raz interviews Tony Fadell who helped design the iPod. He said one challenge of working in user experience is that you often spot bad design – and one example is fruit stickers. He notes how those stickers were designed to make it easier to check out at the grocery counter, but that convenience is overshadowed by the fact that those stickers are so difficult to remove. He talks about how bad design wears on you. When you first experience it, you are annoyed. But over time, you just deal with it. We accept things even if they are poorly designed.

That is a great message. There are so many annoying types of packaging designed based on rules – either it was cheap to produce or it fulfills a legality – but now it will never degrade. My hope is Trashmagination draws your attention to that packaging and we find a way to creatively reuse it, not buy it or ask the manufacturer to change the way it's made. But back to fruit stickers. How could we creatively reuse them? Does it matter if we leave them on the peels in compost?

Alternatives to Typical Plastic Stickers

Most fruit stickers are made from edible or food-safe paper. That doesn't mean you *should* eat them, but if you did or if they got baked in a pie, in theory that would not hurt you. And yet other websites note that these stickers are mostly plastic – so that's why you should remove them before composting the peels. It seems contradictory that stickers are edible but plastic, although I guess we probably eat bits of plastic all the time.

A company named Amron makes a fruit sticker which dissolves and becomes a produce wash. This helps remove wax, pesticides and bacteria [http://www.amronexperimental.com/Fruit_Wash_Labels.html]. It's called the Vanishing FruitWash label but I don't know if any fruit companies actually use it. There are also compostable stickers [<https://compostablesticker.com/>] made by the company Plan It Green Printing.

A year ago, two companies in Europe started to replace sticky labels with a laser mark. They called it "natural branding." They remove some pigment from the fruit skin to make the brand. A spokesperson from the Swedish supermarket ICA estimates that replacing stickers on avocados will save more than 135 miles of plastic about a foot wide [<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jan/16/ms-and-swedish-supermarkets-ditch-sticky-labels->

for-natural-branding]. That gives a hint of how much plastic must be involved with stickers around the world, let alone the energy it takes to run the machines that put stickers on fruit.

In Everett, Washington, there is a program to compost food scraps. These scraps are picked up like garbage or recycling. The company doing the composting, named Cedar Grove Composting, had a problem. Fruit stickers were downgrading their quality. To incentivize people to remove stickers, they created cards. If you fill the card with fruit stickers, you get a free bag of compost [<http://www.heraldnet.com/news/new-incentive-for-peeling-those-pesky-stickers-off-fruit/>]. What a great program!

Other Fun Facts about Fruit Stickers

The numbers on fruit stickers are consistent around the world. Every organic banana has the same number. Conventionally-grown non-organic fruit has four digits. Organic fruit has five numbers and genetically modified fruit has five numbers as well but they always start with an 8. I saw a reminder which was “9 – it’s mine, 8 – don’t take.”

You might wonder – how do the stickers get on the fruit? For a moment of zen, I will embed a video in the show notes that features the machines which put stickers on fruit. It’s all based on vacuums.

Artists Who Use Fruit Stickers in their Work

I love to share the stories of artists who incorporate the recycled materials that we are discussing in each episode, and this week’s artists are particularly fun.

Kelly Angood has an Instagram account called [fruit_stickers](https://www.instagram.com/fruit_stickers/) [https://www.instagram.com/fruit_stickers/] and as of today, she has more than 700 different fruit stickers featured and more than 23,000 followers. Collectors estimate that there are more than 65,000 fruit stickers in the world, so lots to collect! [<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/fruit-stickers-kelly-angood-221116>] Kelly’s collection reminds me of how I used to collect stickers when I was elementary school in a photo album, and that included fruit stickers. I am not the only person who did this. If you look on Instagram at the hashtag #fruitstickers – which has more than 1800 posts – the top posts are people flipping through their scrapbooks filled with fruit stickers. Kelly started her collection as a study in graphic design. It’s a great resource for those studying logo design or food packaging. In 2017, she screen-printed a planner where you can stick fruit stickers each day to track your fruit intake [<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/kellyangood/fruit-stickers-2017-year-planner/posts/1741536>].

Barry Snyder has a website called Stickerman Product Art where he makes art from fruit stickers [<https://stickermanproduceart.wordpress.com/>]. You can mail your stickers to him in Colorado. His work looks like mosaics and they are beautiful. He has re-created many famous artworks with fruit stickers.
Barry Snyder, PO Box 301, Erie, CO 80516

Efren Ave makes mosaics from fruit stickers [<https://www.instagram.com/efrenave/>]. For all my quilting friends, check out these designs which sometimes look like quilt blocks. My favorite is called Entropy made from mango stickers.

Stefano Fiorina covered fruit with fruit stickers and then photographed it. He then printed the images as giant stickers he stuck around the walls of his city. [<http://www.stefanofiorina.com/projects-fruit-masters.html>].

Fun Fruit Sticker Activities

Maybe you don't want to make art from fruit stickers, but here are other fun activities.

You can take a "fruit sticker selfie." This was an idea put forward during Nutrition Month last year by Australian Jennifer Howard [<http://andytherd.com/2017/03/01/fruit-sticker-selfie-nutrition-month-special-guest-blog/>]. She encourages people to wear stickers from the fruit you have eaten to spark conversation and she invented the hashtag #fruitstickerselfie. When she started wearing fruit stickers, people would stop her to tell her she had a sticker stuck on her shirt, thinking it was by mistake, and then she could talk with them about nutrition. I like Jennifer's campaign because as we know, there are communities where it is challenging to get fresh fruit. I live near Washington DC and there are parts of the city with almost no grocery stores.

You can use fruit stickers in a journal. Shanna Noel designs Bibles with space where people write notes or decorate. She shared a suggestion in May 2017 about putting fruit stickers in your Bible [<https://www.illustratedfaith.com/use-fruit-produce-stickers/>]. She put her fruit stickers on a page with the Bible verse Galatians chapter 5 verses 22-23:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Illuminated Faith is not the only journal using fruit stickers. I saw videos on Instagram of bullet journalers also saving fruit stickers [https://www.instagram.com/onki_art/].

You can use fruit stickers to teach kids about nutrition. There are many downloadable activity sheets. Sometimes these are incorporated in a Bible School lesson based on that verse from Galatians [<http://joyinmykitchen.com/fruit-of-the-spirit-for-kids-preschool-activities/>]. I saw a cute activity with a fruit peacock by Kathrin Jepsen-Marwedel where the body was made from a pear drawing and the tail feathers were places to put fruit stickers [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BNuj5BxgqKy/>]

If you are an art teacher, you can teach about mandalas, collages and mosaics with fruit stickers. Here's two Instagram posts that you can show for inspiration – a mandala by Laurien Baart [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BP0AVP7A6Kq/>] and a collage by collagesdevee [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BPqVzyfjxGd/>].

You can collect fruit stickers as a hobby. There is a word in French to describe this hobby, which is "Légufurabélophile" [<http://www.alphabettes.org/roxane-loves-fruit-stickers/>]. There is an international community of fruit sticker collectors who trade back and forth. If you have a word for this hobby in your language, please let me know at trashmagination@gmail.com. And I guess we need to invent a word in English for this hobby!

There is a book called *Wreck This Journal* that has a page where it encourages you to collect fruit stickers [<https://www.amazon.com/Wreck-This-Journal-Keri-Smith/dp/039953346X>].

Most importantly, you can remove your fruit stickers before you compost your fruit and vegetable peelings. And if you want to support more fruit sticker art, you can mail them to one of the artists we talked about!

You can avoid fruit stickers altogether by purchasing fruit at your local farmer's market.

Finally, you can put a fruit sticker on a baby's head and take a photo of it from the top – you'll see it looks just like a kiwi or peach [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFFyCgJHs17>].

Until next time – may you see trash as a source of happy stickers in your life.