



Trashmagination Podcast #49 – Chopsticks

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

Let's talk about the creative reuse of single-use chopsticks. In 2013, the Huffington Post reported that China was producing 80 billion disposable chopsticks per year¹. Even though many chopsticks are made from bamboo, which is a rapidly growing grass, many are made from other types of wood. The demand for disposable chopsticks is increasing. This year, there has been a backlash against plastic straws and cutlery. We should also reconsider single-use chopsticks. More people are carrying reusable straws, cutlery and chopsticks when they eat out. I started this practice last December, although I need a larger collection of four sets for my whole family.

It's great if you can turn away disposable chopsticks to preserve wildlife habitat. Earlier this month on May 5, it was Salamander Appreciation Day and an organization called Foundation for the Conservation of Salamanders started a campaign in 2011 called Chopsticks for Salamanders [<https://www.fcsal.org/cfs>]. They used to sell metal reusable chopsticks in a salamander-themed fabric case, but now they just encourage you to use any reusable chopsticks.

But perhaps you have gathered a small collection of disposable chopsticks. Here's ideas for what to do.

Not many companies recycle chopsticks. The only one I could find was ChopValue in Vancouver, Canada [<https://chopvalue.ca>]. They make many beautiful furniture designs and these beautiful honeycomb-shaped shelving units. They make wooden tiles that you can put on your walls in many designs. If you live in Vancouver, you can visit their website to see their chopstick collection sites.

However, if you don't live in Vancouver, you should check out my Pinterest board of craft ideas made from chopsticks - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/chopsticks/>:

1. **Basket** – You can make a folding basket by drilling chopsticks [<https://www.isavea2z.com/how-to-make-a-chopsticks-basket/>]. I'll link to a tutorial.
2. **Necklace** – You can paint chopsticks with a glossy paint and then drill a hole so they become beautiful beads for a necklace [<https://www.recyclart.org/2016/01/upcycled-chopstick-necklace/>].
3. **Hair sticks** – Some people decorate chopsticks with beads, feathers & paint to help hold their long hair in a bun.
4. **God's Eye** – When I was a kid, a popular summer camp craft was called a "God's Eye" where you take two sticks (which could be chopsticks) and wrap yarn around them in a woven design.
5. **Doll house furniture** – In episode 34, I talked about doll house furniture from recycled materials, and chopsticks are often a great material. I'll share links to ideas for a bookshelf [<http://skalaminimal.blogspot.com/2014/04/onsdagskurs-16-april.html?m=1>] and a doll bed from chopsticks.

There are chopstick activities for kids. I have seen a game called the "chopstick challenge" where participants have to lift items using chopsticks. They see how many they can move in 30 seconds for example. The easy level might be pom poms, then glass marbles, then grains of uncooked rice. Or you could just have two buckets and have kids practice

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/11/chopstick-china-forests_n_2853033.html?utm_hp_ref=green

moving items [<http://playfullylearning.blogspot.com/2011/05/simple-sensory-table-idea-pom-poms.html>]. Another activity idea is to attach moustaches or eyeglass shapes to chopsticks for a photo booth.

Another source of waste related to chopsticks are the paper wrappers or sleeve. On Pinterest, I saw lots of tutorials to teach you how to fold the chopstick sleeve into a little holder for your chopsticks to keep them off the table. They came in many beautiful designs. In fact, there is an initiative related to chopstick sleeve art. **Yuki Tatsumi** was a waiter and noticed that some customers liked to fold chopstick sleeves into small designs. He started collecting them and soon had a collection of more than 13,000 designs [<http://www.spoon-tamago.com/2017/12/16/a-display-of-8000-paper-sculptures-made-from-chopstick-sleeves/>]. He made a website which says “Wrapping chopsticks is the way of welcoming the guest. Folding the wrapping is the way of saying “thank you” to the host.” You can follow this project on Facebook at the account called Japanese Tip <https://www.facebook.com/JapaneseTip/>. It looks like the designs will appear in a book this summer.

Here are more examples of artists incorporating chopsticks in their work – although they did not use recycled chopsticks:

Red Hong Yi makes portraits from chopsticks, including one of Jackie Chan [<http://redhongyi.com/portfolio/jackie-chan-chopsticks-portrait/>]. She groups the chopsticks in clumps and hangs them vertically. The places with largest clumps look darker. She made another piece from chopsticks by burning them to make one end darker. I’ll share a video showing her technique. She makes art from lots of creatively reused materials, including tea bags which I mentioned in episode 43.

Yuya Ushida made a sofa from 8,000 chopsticks [http://www.yuyavsdesign.com/SOFA_XXXX.html]. Its geometric design expanded and contracted to become a chair or a full sofa. In the show notes, I will share a video showing Yuya manipulating his chopstick sofa.

In 2008, **Shuhei Ogawara** built a canoe from 7,382 chopsticks [<https://www.treehugger.com/sustainable-product-design/canoe-built-from-disposable-chopsticks.html>]. What have you made with chopsticks or chopstick sleeves? Have you invented any fun children’s activities that involve chopsticks?

Until next time – may you see art in your chopsticks and thanks for listening.