



Trashmagination Podcast #50 – Creative Reuse Camping and Hiking

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

This week's episode is about creative reuse ideas related to camping and hiking. I love camping and hiking. I was a Girl Guide growing up in Canada, and now I'm a merit badge counselor for my son's Boy Scout troop. Those programs emphasize the ethic of Leave No Trace. This means you leave your campsite and trail looking better than when you arrived. There are Leave No Trace principles related to how you go to the bathroom, choose a campsite, or dispose of cooking water. I'm going to assume you know about those tips – today our focus will be on how to prepare for your camping or hiking trip to reduce your impact and to creatively reuse. We'll talk about:

- where to get gear, whether secondhand, rented or new
- the creative reuse challenges associated with stoves and lanterns
- reducing food packaging waste
- preparing for long-distance hikes
- finding ways to creatively reuse at your campsite
- what to do with damaged camping gear
- trash at music festivals where people camp

Where to Get Low-Impact Camping Gear

The most obvious way to creatively reuse when camping or hiking is to purchase secondhand or rent equipment. For example, REI has a website where you can purchase used gear [<https://www.rei.com/used/>]. This is gear that REI members have returned. REI only offers items that are in great shape. Patagonia also offers this service at their "Worn Wear" website [<https://wornwear.patagonia.com/>].

You can also rent equipment from REI and many camping stores [<https://www.rei.com/stores/rentals.html>]. This is a great way to try out a brand before you invest in purchasing the item. However, it's not available everywhere.

The websites Geartrade [<https://www.geartrade.com/>] and GearX [<https://www.gearx.com/>] are online marketplaces where you can sell or purchase used camping and hiking equipment.

I mentioned in past episodes that on Facebook, there is a network of "Buy Nothing" groups organized at the community level. It is worthwhile to post your camping or hiking wish list. Many people have gear that they just don't want. My son's Scout troop has a Swap Night once a year. You can also donate unwanted gear to your local Scout or Guide troops.

Speaking of renting camping gear, my family is trying a new kind of camping adventure this summer. We are renting a yurt in Pennsylvania. We have also stayed in a treehouse in New Brunswick. We get the camping experience without having to pack our tent or sleeping pads which take up a lot of space in our trunk.

For those who want to buy new gear, many companies now use recycled polyester made from recycled plastic bottles. When I visited the websites of many brands which make tents, sleeping bags and other gear, most talked about this shift in the industry. For example, **Marmot** makes a line of sleeping bags called Treadlight stuffed with recycled down that

they took from used sleeping bags and coats. Some companies like REI let you search their products by those which contain recycled materials. Equipment at discount stores tend to be not made from recycled materials.

Another important item when camping and hiking is your rain gear. I just learned about a company based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia where I attended high school that makes children's rain gear and backpacks from recycled plastic bottles. It takes a lots of guts to manufacture clothing in Canada and with recycled materials, so I hope you will check them out. The company is called Faire Child – Faire with an E [<https://fairechild.com/>].

Stoves and Lanterns

Now let's talk about camp stoves or lanterns. My stove is the kind where you pour in the fuel. Recently I learned about a camp stove called the BioLite [<https://blog.bioliteenergy.com/blogs/clinic/how-does-campstove-2-work>]. These stoves have a compartment inside where you put small twigs and burn them. As the twigs burn, they create electricity. The electricity runs a fan which increases the intensity of the heat produced by the wood. This reduces smoke by 90 percent and uses 50 percent less wood than a campfire. You can even charge your phone or other devices off this stove. I also appreciate how BioLite has a mission to bring these stoves to countries where people currently cook over unhealthy fires and suffer respiratory illnesses. I will put a video showing how these stoves work in the show notes. The main problem with this type of stove is that you could not use it in places where there is a fire ban.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/kDLajIJCqHU" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Many campers use stoves that rely on a metal, pressurized fuel canister. This option is not great for the environment because they are not currently refillable. However, you can reduce the number of canisters you burn. You can build a wind shield to help the stove burn more efficiently. If you are making coffee or other warm drinks, you can heat the water until it's really warm but not all the way to boiling. You can plan menus that take less time to cook, such as couscous, which uses less fuel than rice or other pastas.

You shouldn't throw these fuel canisters in the trash or recycling. Check with your recycling program. Typically, to prepare these canisters for recycling, you must burn off all the fuel, puncture the canister and then label it as punctured. To see if you have burned off the fuel, some canisters have markings on the side. When you float the canister in water, it will sink deeper if it is full. If you are not sure if you have burned off the fuel, you can set it up with your stove and light it, letting it run until it's empty.

Many lanterns run on fuel, but there are great solar options. Many lanterns squish down into a smaller size which is a great option for backpacking. They rely on a tiny LED bulb and a solar panel rather than a huge fuel canister. You attach them on the outside of your backpack or tent so they charge all day. One brand is LuminAID, which like BioLite, provides lights to places overseas where there is limited electricity infrastructure.

Reducing Food Packaging Waste While Camping and Hiking

I'm going to assume that everyone will bring reusable, washable dishes, and move on to the bigger challenges of food packaging waste when camping and hiking. One challenge is that you don't have access to your fridge and spice shelf. I have seen many camping trips where people create a lot of food packaging waste.

One tip is to dehydrate your food in advance with a dehydrator or in your oven. When I hiked the West Coast Trail many years ago, we made a lot of dried fruit leather in an oven. We lined the leather with wax paper instead of plastic. Making your own granola bars can also reduce packaging.

In general, you can reduce food packaging waste if you pre-package items into reusable containers at home. We know that buying in bulk is the first step in reducing packaging waste. Preparing the food at home can also make it easier to cook while outdoors where you may not have a counter or table. For example, you could avoid transporting eggs which might break and instead crack open the amount you need and put it in a recycled plastic bottle. You can also pre-measure pancake mix in a squirty plastic bottle, like a ketchup bottle, and add water at camp.

When I was researching, I saw a fun creative reuse breakfast idea. You can bake a cinnamon bun in an orange peel over a campfire [<http://www.trulysimple.com/2010/06/orange-rolls-cooked-orange/>]. First you cut the orange in half and scoop out fruit. Then you put the cinnamon bun dough in the peel, and place it in a pan over the fire, covered with tinfoil. Some people filled the orange half with cake batter. Sounds like a fun thing to test this summer!

Here's a different packaging challenge. My son has repeatedly lost parts of his first aid kit while camping. He gets a scratch, opens the kit and all that stuff seems to disappear. But those tubes of antibiotic cream and hydrocortisone costs like \$8 each. So I'm going to squirt a single-use amount into a plastic straw and then seal the ends with a candle. This is great for spices as well. I'll share a video in the show notes. Hopefully this will reduce waste and expense.

Long-Distance Hike Preparation

Preparing for a long-distance hike is a whole other level of preparation. At least when you are trying to travel light, you might produce less trash – but then you might also buy a lot of individually-packaged meals. I heard a podcast episode of Zero Waste Countdown with two long-distance hikers who hiked for almost six months [<https://zerowastecountdown.podbean.com/e/hiking-and-camping-zero-waste/>]. Their story inspired me to make this episode! I'll put a link to the podcast in the show notes.

Creative Reuse Camping Hacks

Next I'll share ideas for how you can creatively reuse objects while you are at the campsite. When we use a one piece of gear to do multiple things, it means we potentially could pack less stuff!

- I like a pillow but packing a pillow takes up a lot of space. Instead you can take your stuff sack, which is a bag that compresses your stuff into a smaller space, and stuff all your soft items inside. Then you have a pillow!
- If you are going to hang items on a clothesline, you can use bread tags instead of clothespins.
- If you are providing your own toilet paper, I saw some nifty creative reuse projects to keep the paper dry which included an old CD spindle or a plastic coffee grounds container with a slit cut in the top.
- I have been saving up dryer lint to make firestarters. We can put it in egg cartons or toilet paper rolls.
- To practice his knot-tying skills, my son built a hand-washing station for Scouts last week. Next we are going to add a plastic laundry detergent container where the Scouts can pour water on their hands. We need to find the kind with the spigot. We don't use this type of detergent but I'm going to scan my neighbor's recycling bins.
- You can make a lantern by attaching your head lamp to a plastic container filled with water. It makes a nice diffuse light that fills a tent.

What to Do with Damaged Camping Gear

Many companies make bags from used tents. One of my favorite is **crackpacs**, a UK-based company [<https://www.crackpacs.com/>]. They make backpacks and chalk bags. Chalk bags are like fabric buckets that hold chalk dust used by rock climbers.

In 2012, I was in Boulder, Colorado, where I visited **Green Guru** which makes backpacks and bike bags from recycled materials including event tents [<https://www.greengurugear.com/>]. These tents are the kind made by corporations for big events. I don't believe they take smaller tents.

The best way to make your gear last is to take good care of your equipment after your trip. It's not easy to find ways to creatively reuse a ripped or mildewed tent! This sounds obvious, but it's really important to put up your tent in the sun after your camping trip, to sweep it out and wipe it down, to put patches on any rips. A little hand broom, a bucket with warm soapy water – these are essential post-camping equipment. If something does break in your tent, like a tent pole, many manufacturers will replace the part. Store sleeping bags unrolled or loosely folded.

Music Festival Camping Trash

Sometimes people at big outdoor musical festival bring tents, but leave their tents along with a massive amount of trash. Some people thought that volunteers collected the tents for reuse, but that was not usually the case. Now some festivals require people to sign a code of conduct. There's a campaign called Love Your Tent which encourages people to take responsibility for their gear [<http://loveyourtent.com>].

A Dutch company addressed the problem in a different way. They designed a cardboard tent called **kartent** [<https://www.designboom.com/design/kartent-recyclable-cardboard-tents-festivals-eco-05-30-2018/>]. How would cardboard stand up if there is rain? The designers say the tent will work even if it rains for a 2-3 day period. Festival organizers set them up in advance and charge rent, then take them all down and recycle them. This seems wasteful to me, but I guess cardboard is easier to recycle than tents?

What creative reuse tips do you have related to camping or hiking? I would love to share your ideas with my Scouts. My family can test all the ideas in our yurt this summer.

Thank you!

This is the 50th episode of the Trashmagination podcast! Thank you for listening! A special thank you to neondiamond212 who left a review of Trashmagination on iTunes which said "You make recycling sound fun! From shoes and t-shirts to beach trash and bottle caps-I now actually stop before I throw something in the trash or recycle bin and think, what would Carla Brown do with this!" It was so motivating!

Until next time – may camping and hiking be yet another opportunity to creatively reuse!