



Trashmagination Podcast #52 – Bread Tags or Clips

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

This week's episode is about plastic bread tags or clips. Those are little squares or rectangles of plastic with a divot cut out of them which are usually found on bags of store-bought bread. I'm wondering if there are other words for these things in other cultures. Let me know if you call it something else! I will call them bread tags in this podcast episode.

Many years ago, I vaguely remember a quilt that featured bread tags sewn into little pockets of sheer fabric, but I cannot find that quilt through any online search. I am not even sure it was a real quilt or if I dreamt it. If that description reminds you of a real quilt, please let me know! I have been holding off on doing this podcast episode until I found that quilt, but I have been looking for a long time, so I'm going to put it out in the universe and see if anyone remembers it.

Where Do Bread Tags Come From?

The company which makes bread tags in the US is called Kwik Lok is located in Yakima, Washington. Bread tags are made from polystyrene or type 6 plastic. In last week's podcast episode, I talked about clamshell packaging which is also type 6 but usually transparent, and many municipalities do not accept this plastic in their waste stream. Bread tags would definitely count as contamination in your recycling bin because they are too tiny to be caught by the recycling sorting machines and could even cause them to break.

<https://www.facebook.com/greatbigstory/videos/1865487573753667/>

So it's important to find creative reuse ideas for bread tags, but even better, it would be great if we could bring our own bags when we buy bread. I haven't started doing this yet, but here's a story from Bea Johnson in her book Zero Waste Home. She made a bread bag from recycled sheet. When she arrives at Whole Foods, she orders bread at the bakery and it bakes while she shops. She picks it up before they put it in the packaging [https://zerowastehome.com/2010/01/12/zero-waste-grocery-shopping/].

Where to Send Bread Tags

Let's start by talking about where to send bread tags or clips if you are not saving them up for your own art projects.

If you are in South Africa, there is an organization called Breadtags for Wheelchairs [http://www.breadtagsforwheelchairs.co.za/]. They gather bread tags and sell them to recyclers for money to buy wheelchairs. The organization's founder Mary Honeybun says it takes 600,000 bread tags to buy one wheelchair. That seems like an awful lot, but then imagine if all those bread tags were going into the trash and not getting recycled at all! You must see the video because it shows how the volunteers sort the tags into bread bags and weigh them. The organization collected five tons of bread tags in one year! Here's what Mary says at the end of the video: "Service to others is the rent that we pay for our place on earth."

In the United States, an organization called Danielle Cares for Chairs also collects bread tags in order to fundraise for wheelchairs [https://daniellecaresforchairs.wixsite.com/daniellecareforchair/]. In March 2018, the organization set a record for making the world's longest chain of bread tags with a huge group of volunteers. It was more than 1,100 yards long. The founder, Danielle Rothchild, started her project when she was in high school and she made a dress from 5,000 bread

tags to compete in a state contest for creative reuse [<https://www.indystar.com/story/news/local/hamilton-county/2017/05/22/carmel-teen-makes-dress-out-plastic-and-its-all-greater-good/324611001/>]. The event was through an organization called the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America – I will link to info about that contest in the show notes [<http://fcclainc.org/programs/star-event-descriptions.php>]. She started collecting the tags for her dress, but the collection process went so well that she received 40,000 bread tags. She realized that she needed to find another use for them, and that’s when she learned about the organization in South Africa – Breadtags for Wheelchairs – and decided to follow the example.

If just these two organizations are gathering *tons* of bread tags, imagine how many end up in landfill or the ocean.

In Australia, I found two artists making installations from bread tags:

- The Bread Clip Appreciation Society - <https://www.instagram.com/breadclipappreciationsociety/> - 1 / 101 Queen St Woollahra NSW 2025 Australia
- The Breadtag Project - <https://www.facebook.com/pg/breadtagproject/>

The artist behind the Breadtag Project is Shani Nottingham, and she makes cute sculptures from her bread tags like a slice of watermelon or a cactus. You can see some examples in the show notes.

If anyone knows of organizations or artists who are collecting bread tags in other parts of the world, please let me know and I’ll add them to the show notes. I have been collecting bread tags for many years and my collection fits inside a shoebox. It takes a long time to gather enough to do a mosaic or any sizeable installation.

What to Make with Bread Tags and Clips

Now let’s switch gears and talk about things YOU can do with bread tags.

- Put it on the end of a roll of tape so you don’t have to use your fingernail to start a new piece.
- Stick them on the pages of a book to make tabs to quickly find a spot in the book.
- Label cords hanging behind a desk so you don’t have to guess which cord goes with each device.
- When you serve wine, put them on the stem so people can find their own glass. These are sometimes called “wine charms.”
- If you wear the type of flip flop that has a little piece that goes between your toes, and that part breaks, you can put a bread tag under the sole to hold it in place.
- Use it as a guitar pick.
- Make a shaker toy or abacus [<http://almostunschoolers.blogspot.com/2011/01/cereal-box-and-bread-clip-counting.html>] from bread tags and milk jugs – and if you can’t picture that – check the links on the Pinterest board that I made for bread tags and clips [<https://www.pinterest.com/trashmagination/bread-tags/>]
- The blog “Raising Dragons” makes an alphabet or math activity by writing letters or numbers on bread tags [<https://www.raisingdragons.com/bread-clip-alphabet/>]. For one activity, the kids pick up a bread tags by sucking through a straw and lifting them into a cup.
- **Amanda Formaro** has a very cute style that she applies to bread tags in order to make monsters [<https://craftsbyamanda.com/recycled-bread-tag-monsters/>], gingerbread people [<https://craftsbyamanda.com/bread-tag-gingerbread-men/>] and snowmen [<https://craftsbyamanda.com/recycled-bread-tag-snowmen/>]. She paints the bread tags first and then adds details including googly eyes. If you add a safety pin to the back of these designs, they can become pins or “swaps” if you are a Girl Scout.
- You might remember **Noah Scalin** – I mentioned him back in the episode on shoes. He wrote a book called “Skull-A-Day. Skull #24 was bread tag skull design made from three white bread tags and some safety pins - <https://skulladay.blogspot.com/2007/06/24-closure-skull.html>.
- Various artists incorporate bread tags into their designs of birthday cards [<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/496099715190354730/>].

- There is some variability in the cut-out shape of bread tags. Some look like a heart while others look like an X, or a bunch of other shapes. **Ismael Cavazos** doodles on and around bread tags. Sometimes he draws two hands cupped in the shape of a heart, or a little squirrel or a tiger.

Building Community with Bread Tags

Besides gathering bread tags to raise funds for wheelchairs, here are examples of artists who did projects with bread tags that I think could be fun to do within a community such as a classroom.

- **The Bread Clip Appreciation Society** made a world map from bread clips.
- **The Eco-Teacher** made a Periodic Table of Elements from bread tags.
- **S.J. Wang** shared a photo on Twitter of an adorable cat that he made from a bread tag, and then lots of other people started sharing their own designs of kitties, puppies and a rhinoceros [<https://laughingsquid.com/adorable-cats-dogs-made-out-of-bread-bag-clips/>].
- **Edwin Godfrey** took on a project in 2017 which was to find a bread tag for each day of the year stamped with the date. On his Instagram feed [poplatags](https://www.instagram.com/poplatags/), he posted a photo of the tag each day and then he would make videos of them in order [<https://www.instagram.com/poplatags/>].
- **Gavin Moores** makes giant mandalas from bread clips [<https://www.facebook.com/BreadClipArt/>].
- **Mango Sea** makes sea turtles, jellyfish and sharks from bread tag and balloon tag pieces that they find washed up on the beach in Australia.

Artists who make Complicated Items with Bread Tags

Here are more stories about various artists who work with bread tags.

- **Stephanie Watson** sewed a wedding gown from 10,000 bread tags in 2013 [<https://www.treehugger.com/sustainable-fashion/bride-marries-in-wedding-dress-made-of-upcycled-bread-bag-clips.html>]. It took her 300 hours to sew on all the tags.
- **Paul Schultz** is an architect who incorporates bread tags in some of his designs. He made a wall in a kitchen from layers of plexiglass with bread clips suspended inside [<https://www.studioiql.com/allens-lane>]. He also made a public art project with a backlit display featuring bread tags [<http://drexel.edu/now/archive/2011/September/LOOK-Lancaster-Ave/>].
- **Ahna Adair** made rings from bread tags. She stacks bread tags on top of each other, glues them and then drills a hole the size of a finger. Her website is not currently working but I'll link to a website that shows a photo of her ring [<http://www.thecarrotbox.com/blog/1012.asp>].
- **Beth Taylor** made planets and moons from melted bread tags [<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/artist-finds-beauty-in-the-plastic-bread-tag-20110701-1gtxt.html>].
- **Elizabeth Saveri** paints wonderful scenes and portraits on bread tags [<https://www.instagram.com/elizabethsaveri/>].

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Who knew there were so many people doing creative activities with bread tags or clips! I would love to hear how you creatively reuse them at trashmagination@gmail.com.

Until next time – may you see bread tags or clips as a source of art in your life!