



Trashmagination Podcast #57 – Glass Bottles and Jars

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

This week's episode is about creatively reuse of glass bottles and jars. This topic was requested by my friend Alexis, who also inspired the episode on creative reuse of worn-out or mismatched socks [<https://trashmagination.com/creative-reuse-socks/>]. You can inspire a future podcast episode by sending any creative reuse questions to trashmagination@gmail.com!

Alexis said that she has some especially beautiful glass bottles and jars – too beautiful to put in the recycling bin. She had already made a beautiful centerpiece by filling a bottle with LED lights. Her husband had figured out how to drill a hole near the base of the bottle to string in the lights.

I had never spent a lot of time thinking about glass jars and bottles because I know there are good markets for recycled glass. I wanted to focus my attention on items that would definitely go to landfill. However, it is better for the environment if we reuse jars than recycle them. It takes a lot of energy to pulverize and reconstitute glass, let alone transporting heavy glass from place to place. Plus I learned so many amazing ways to reuse glass bottles and jars while researching this episode – I can't wait to buy everything in glass going forward.

I recently saw a video of a machine that can pulverize a glass bottle and make it into sand in only a few seconds [<https://www.facebook.com/DavidAvocadoWolfe/videos/1015428197628>]. This sand can be used in industrial processes instead of harvesting sand from the environment, and there is a golf course in Laguna Beach which replenishes their bunkers with sand made from pulverized glass bottles [<https://www.theranchlb.com/ranch/sustainability>]. While it looks cool to see the glass pulverized instantly, there absolutely must be better ways to creatively reuse this material.

When I was growing up, we went to the Pop Shoppe where I was allowed to choose one bottle of soda for my family's six pack, and we returned the bottles every week. Nowadays, my family purchases our milk in reusable bottles that go back to the farmer for reuse over and over. In Europe, there are better systems for recovering glass bottles and reusing them for the same purpose until they are too scratched up or chipped.

So today we'll talk about:

- ways to creatively reuse glass bottles and jars that don't require you to change the bottles and jars in any way
- reuse ideas that involve painting bottles and jars
- reuse ideas that involve cutting or melting bottles and jars
- artists near you who want your beautiful glass bottles and jars
- and finally – a fun vacation suggestion which is to visit glass bottle houses!

Preparing Bottles and Jars for Creative Reuse

It's important to clean your glass bottles and jars before recycling or reusing them. It can be tricky to get the labels off the jars. I'll link to a tutorial in the show notes with suggestions for removing labels from a whole bunch of jars or if you have a very stubborn label [<https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/how-to-remove-labels-from-jars-and-turn-jars-into-glassware-242651>].

Reusing Glass Bottles and Jars in Your Home

Once your glass bottles and jars are clean, it's time to start reusing them. Right now I have many zero-waste goals related to glass bottles and jars. When you watch videos about people who are living a zero-waste lifestyle, they always have their food and bathroom items stored in glass jars. I find that after watching these videos, my eyes suddenly look at all the plastic around my home and imagine those items now in glass containers. My family made the shift to glass containers to store leftovers many years ago, and it was a great decision.

For inspiration, I'll share a video in the show notes of a family in Tasmania giving a home tour – Oberon and Laura Carter. I feel really inspired by videos like this which show how it can really work in your home.

[<https://www.facebook.com/ABCTV/videos/10160520533040543/>]

Also, I'll share a video of zero-waste author Aline Gubri giving her house tour. Her tour is in French, and it was so much fun learning all the vocabulary for zero-waste in French. The words for zero waste in French is “zéro déchets.” It can be helpful to learn how to say words like zero waste or creative reuse in other languages so you can search for cool videos not in English. I would love if you would send me the words for creative reuse, zero waste or Trashmagination in other languages. You can message me via social media or at trashmagination@gmail.com. I talked about the word mottainai in my episode on taiko and creative reuse [<https://trashmagination.com/taiko-and-creative-reuse/>] which means “what a waste!” in Japanese, as well as the phrase “sodai gomi” which means big waste.

<https://www.facebook.com/brutofficiel/videos/2041993496050287/>

Aline's books on zero waste in French - <https://www.thierrysoucar.com/sante/livre/zero-plastique-zero-toxique-4160>.

Inspired by these videos and many more, one of my goals is to make toothpaste and store it in a glass jar. I will link to the recipe I am making [<https://whatgreatgrandmaate.com/homemade-clay-toothpaste/>]. It relies on an ingredient called bentonite clay which I purchased at Whole Foods. Unfortunately that was in a plastic container which was frustrating! But hopefully it's a more reusable container than a toothpaste tube. Bentonite clay must be stored in glass or plastic – not metal.

I hope to stop buying hand soap and mouthwash in plastic containers. I plan on attaching a metal squirty attachment to a refillable glass bottle. I might still put a plastic bottle in the bathroom that my kids use because I am worried about them knocking the jar on the floor. That is certainly a consideration for families with smaller children. There is another option to keep glass jars from sliding off the counter. I saw examples where people put a piece of reclaimed wood on the wall, and then clamped glass jars to the wood with something called a hose clamp [<https://thediplaybook.com/2013/04/mason-jar-organizer.html>]. Another project involves making a square wooden box with four sections to hold four jars [<https://www.shanty-2-chic.com/2012/07/mason-jar-centerpieces.html>].

As I mentioned, mason jars are super popular right now. There are lids you can purchase that allow you to put a straw through a hole. Did you know that the lid from many parmesan cheese containers can screw on to a mason jar? Then your mason jar can be a shaker for anything such as baking powder [https://www.countryliving.com/diy-crafts/g1821/mason-jars/?src=arb_fb_pin&pp=0&slide=5].

There are food items we can make in our kitchens in glass jars that can save a lot of plastic and money. Of course you can use glass jars for canning or for storing cool water in the fridge, but here are some more unusual ideas:

- Salads – Lettuce keeps longer in pre-made salads stored in mason jars -
- Homemade vanilla, orange and lemon extract - <http://www.justputzing.com/2013/12/diy-flavored-extracts.html>
- Apple cider vinegar - <https://realfoodrealdeals.com/homemade-apple-cider-vinegar/>
- Sprouts - <https://www.sproutliving.com/home-sprouting-all-you-need-to-know/>
- Kombucha or other fermented items - <http://phickle.com/scobygrowing/>
- Elderflower cordial - <https://www.rivercottage.net/recipes/elderflower-cordial>
- Yogurt cheese (labneh) - <https://chefindisguise.com/2012/05/12/homemade-labneh-recipe/>

There are also fun gifts you can put in recycled glass jars, such as ingredients to make soups or cookies. These are handy for teachers especially! [https://www.countryliving.com/diy-crafts/g1821/mason-jars/?src=arb_fb_pin&pp=0&slide=43] I think the perfect gift might be homemade jam or relishes made from ingredients you picked, just like grandfather used to make.

Mostly I have talked about serious uses of glass jars in your kitchen, but glass jars can also be a fun decorative item. I saw a candy jar crafts which involved gluing recycled wooden candle sticks or spindles to a jar full of candies [<https://www.livingwellspendingless.com/2013/03/25/diy-mason-jar-candy-pedestals/>]. This can be a fun decorative use especially with seasonal candy – like candy eggs in the spring or holiday candy in the winter.

Reusing Glass Bottles and Jars on Your Patio

Now let's talk about ways to reuse glass bottles and jars outside in your yard or on your patio. Some folks make torches from glass bottles by putting citronella torch fuel in the bottle, and then adding a wick made from cotton rope [<https://www.facebook.com/buzzfeednifty/videos/2100838910170830/>]. These torches can be a great addition to your porch to repel insects.

In the southern United States, there is a tradition called a bottle tree. This involves a metal tree where the bottles are slid onto the branches so they are facing downwards. Sometimes the tree is made from a tall post and then thick nails or rebar stakes stick out like branches [<http://www.penick.net/digging/?s=bottle+tree>]. You can even buy the metal base for the bottle tree on websites like gardeners.com [<https://www.gardeners.com/buy/bottle-tree/40-060.html#start=23>] – you can search under the category of “decorative garden stakes” – stake is spelled s-t-a-k-e. I saw a whole Christmas tree made from green recycled bottles [<http://cookingwithsin.com/2015/12/20/wine-bottle-christmas-trees/>]!

I have a special memory from my teenage years that involves a trail through the snow lit by luminaria. Luminaria are little lanterns. If you wanted to make a special memory for someone, you could collect glass jars and surprise them with a luminaria-lit trail. I bet you didn't know you were going to get tips on romance in this podcast episode!

Painting Glass Bottles and Jars

Next I'll share ideas for crafts you can make from glass bottles. You can give your less-colorful glass jars and bottles a colorful makeover by swirling paint inside the jar. The blog Color Me Happy shares fun designs where she makes mason jars into adorable designs [<https://colormadehappy.com/mason-jars-craft-school-supplies/>]. For example, she made school supplies themed jars for teacher gifts. She painted the jars to look like a box of crayons, a calculator etc. There are a lot of painted jar crafts on Pinterest related to Halloween where you put silhouettes of spooky creatures backlit by candles [<https://lecoindemel.com/upcycled-halloween-lanterns-10-minute-crafts/>].

You can also paint clear glass to turn it into colorful glass using glass paint [<https://atcharlotteshouse.com/painted-rainbow-glass-2/>]. Some people use glass in their décor but you can upgrade your plain glass jars into something more fancy. I'll share a tutorial in the show notes.

I mentioned creative reuse artist Danny Seo back in the episode on recycling mattresses and box springs. I have been following his work for many decades. He has a tutorial where he uses puffy paint to put little circular dabs on a glass bottle, and then he paints over the whole bottle. He calls it “sea urchin inspired glassware.”

[<https://www.facebook.com/NaturallyDannyTV/videos/575969942769304/>] You can also do this craft with recycled metal cans.

Danny uses the puffy paint to add bumps under one coat of paint, but Kris Bordessa from the blog Attainable Sustainable uses different colors of puffy paint to make designs on recycled glass jars [<https://www.attainable-sustainable.net/transform-recycled-jars-into-holiday-decor/>]. These look more like a mosaic of little bumps.

My son did a similar craft at his Harry Potter afterschool club. They used glue guns to make random designs on the glass bottles and then painted over the drips. It made an awesome looking potions bottle. It can also be done on plastic bottles [<http://magiamia.blogspot.com/2013/08/its-glue-gun-plastic-time-again.html>].

Here's one more craft that involves painting bottles and jars. You take a paper napkin with a design that you like, or even scraps of tissue paper, and you paint it on to the surface of the bottle and jar with Mod Podge or diluted glue[<https://youtu.be/66aB2uioPdM>]. This is called decoupage.

Cutting and Melting Glass Bottles and Jars

The next ideas involve cutting or melting glass bottles and jars. There are tutorials that say you can cut glass bottles and jars with string and acetone, but I have heard that mostly does not work or leaves a jagged edge. Most artists recommend a basic bottle cutting tool which sells for about \$20-40. Making crafts from bottles and jars can be a great craft business for someone who likes to do the same steps over and over with precision. The resulting work has a great modern aesthetic that is really popular right now. I have strongly considered learning this skill because I love the projects you can make. My favorite designs are:

- Candle holder – You cut off the bottom of a wine bottle and then place it over a candle. The candle can still get oxygen through the bottle neck, but it protects the candle from getting blown out. I especially like the designs where they line up a few of these along a piece of reclaimed wood with circular holes cut out to hold the bottles and candles.
- Drinking glass – by removing the neck of the bottle
- Candle in a glass – by pouring in wax over a wick [<https://kuttlefish.com/shops/reclamation-candle-company>]
- Garden cloche or terrarium – These are like mini-greenhouses. You cut off the bottom of a wide transparent glass bottle and then place them over baby plants [<http://www.funinthemaking.net/2009/04/18/apple-jug-made-into-effective-garden-cloche/>] and [<http://www.funinthemaking.net/category/reuse-glass-bottles-jars/>]
- Clothes hook – This is made by mounting just the top of the bottle cut on an angle to make a hook [https://www.instagram.com/p/BM4UUzPA_hc/]
- Stained glass window – You can make these from the circular bottoms of glass bottles [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0ck5I3dqj>].

I have been holding off on purchasing a bottle cutter because I already have too many creative reuse projects on-the-go. I am also nervous about cutting myself because I tend to hurt myself easily. There are gloves made from Kevlar which I could wear while handling the glass.

The next craft requires a larger investment than a bottle cutter and gloves. This is called bottle slumping. You might have seen glass bottles that have been melted until they are flat and these can be used as serving platters I have one that was made from a bottle that used to look like a fish, and now it looks like a flattened fish. Bottle slumping involves putting the bottle in an electric glass kiln [<https://www.hunker.com/12262675/how-to-flatten-wine-bottles>]. You could look for artists in your area that do bottle slumping. You can find them often by contacting local stained glass supply stores. That's also where you can buy a kiln if you love the idea of melting the bottles yourself.

Giving Bottles and Jars to Artists

If you have too many colorful glass jars to reuse, see if you can find any local artists who incorporate glass into their work. For example, in Charleston, North Carolina, I found two companies who make glass into countertops – Fisher Recycling [<http://www.fisherrecycling.com/>] and Glass Eco Surfaces [<https://www.glassecosurfaces.com/>]. There is a company in Charlottesville, Virginia who I supported in a Kickstarter called Evolution Glass [<http://www.evolutionglassglobal.com/>]. If you search for recycled glass countertop, you might find a company near you. I know they especially love those Bombay Sapphire aqua blue bottles!

There is a page on my website called My World Tour Plan [<https://trashmagination.com/my-world-tour-plan/>]. I list all the creative reuse artists who I would love to visit someday. There are lots of artists there who focus on recycled glass.

You might find a glass artist right in your neighborhood. I had an experience on my local Buy Nothing group where a guy named Luis Villalobos requested glass jars to make poured candles. I had saved 30 jars from my family's favorite raspberry jam, Bon Maman. He took the jars and made candles for a fundraiser for a charity.

Bottle Houses

I have one last fun idea if you really love recycled glass bottles. Do a search on the term “glass bottle houses.” I found a surprising number of them around the world that you could visit, including:

- Bottle Houses in Prince Edward Island, Canada [<https://bottlehouses.com/>]
- Tom Kelly Bottle Houses (a whole ghost town!) in Nevada [<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/tom-kellys-bottle-house>]
- Cary’s Desert Bottle House – an Air BnB made of recycled bottles [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdbUO5WxS6c>]

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/qdbUO5WxS6c" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Perhaps you will enjoy the creative reuse of glass bottles enough to build your own place?

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! I would love to hear about your creative reuse projects at trashmagination@gmail.com. I gathered ideas on a Pinterest board about the projects I mentioned today [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/glass-jars-and-bottles/>] so I hope that is a helpful resource for you.

I’m still looking for broken camping tents. They can be broken or moldy. I have ideas for ways to reuse both the poles and the nylon or canvas. I am also still looking for colorful plastic bottles, like shampoo bottles. You can check out trashmagination.com to learn more about that project.

Also, I had an idea to share new about art exhibits by my favorite creative reuse artists. You have heard me talk about all of these artists in previous podcast episodes. Maybe they are near you? If you are able to go to these exhibits, take a photo and share them with me!

- In Michigan, there is an exhibit by Michelle Stitzlein called Industrial Nature at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts [<https://www.sc4a.org/industrial-nature/>]. You can see her plants and woven tapestries made from garden hoses along with many other sculptures from plastic materials. This exhibit ends September 7 so get over there!
- Another one of my favorite artists is Aurora Robson, and she currently has pieces in exhibits in In West Nyack, New York, at the Arboretum at Penn State University and in a gallery in Omaha, Nebraska [<http://www.aurorarobson.com/exhibitions/>]. I would especially love to see her plastic sculptures that are housed outside and which glow at dusk due to solar lights.
- Sayaka Ganz has an exhibit opening at the North Carolina Arboretum in Asheville on September 22 called Reclaimed Creations [<https://www.ncarboretum.org/event/reclaimed-creations/2018-09-22/>]. I have been hoping to see this exhibit for months so it’s in my fall travel plans! Her giant animals and plants made from plastic trash are so beautiful!
- Thomas Dambo’s giant trolls built from recycled wooden pallets are on view at the Morton Arboretum near Chicago [<http://www.mortonarb.org/events/troll-hunt>] and he just built a new one in Breckenridge, Colorado [<http://www.breckcreate.org/event/thomas-dambo-peeking-name-tbd/>].

If you know about any creative reuse themed art exhibits in your community, let me know! I always love learning about new artists.

Be sure to share whatever inspired you in today’s podcast with your friends and family! This will let more people know about the Trashmagination podcast and subscribe to get more creative reuse pep talks.

Until next time – may you see glass bottles and jars as a source of art in your life!