



Trashmagination Podcast #62 – Halloween Decorations from Recycled Materials

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

In today's episode, we're going to talk about Halloween decorations from recycled materials. Last October, I did an episode on the many Halloween costumes I have made from recycled materials [<https://trashmagination.com/27-halloween-costumes-from-recycled-materials/>] – so if you are thinking about making a costume, check that out.

The biggest resource for today's episode will be the Trashmagination Pinterest board of Halloween decorations from recycled materials [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/halloween-decor-from-recycled-materials/>] in the show notes. There are a million Halloween decoration ideas out there, but most involve non-recycled materials. Here are ideas that use recycled materials and avoid materials like balloons, spray paint and especially glow sticks. I'm going to share the ideas organized into four categories:

- Candy bowls
- Foliage-based items or decorations that are placed on a tree or a shrub
- Front porch decorations – items that you can put on your porch or door for the weeks leading up to Halloween
- Indoor party décor – different from the front porch items because either they are light-weight items that might blow away, or they take a lot of work to make so you wouldn't want to leave them out where people might vandalize them.

Halloween Candy Bowls from Recycled Materials

Let's start with candy bowls.

My favorite candy bowl is by the blog called The Long Thread. Ellen Baker makes papier-mâché bowls from paper bags [<http://thelongthread.com/2009/10/12/paper-bag-bowls/>]. One is painted orange with a pumpkin face and one is white with a ghost face. She also suggests you could glue on tissue paper instead of painting. She used an actual pumpkin as the base – the bottom where there is no stem.

Jodi Kahn made a candy bowl from candy wrappers [<https://communitytable.parade.com/128386/jodikahn/05-halloween-craft-candy-wrapper-bowl/>]. She irons the wrappers flat and then Mod Podge's them in a bowl shape over an actual bowl. Or another crafter glued them to a recycled pail [<https://www.infarrantlycreative.net/candy-bucket/>].

Sadie Seasongoods made a candy bowl from a barrel covered by a white sheet to make it look like a ghost [<https://www.sadieseasongoods.com/barrel-stand-halloween-candy-bowl-holder/>]. The sheet drapes down from the barrel and she added eyes and a mouth with black paper. She put the candy in the barrel or bucket.

Another candy bowl looks like Frankenstein's head, but it's made from a green 2-liter soda bottle [<http://www.school-of-scrap.com/2009/halloween-candy-bowl-riciclando-bottiglie-pet-frankenstein/>]. This craft is featured on a blog written in Italian, but the photos are quite clear on how to make it, and you can use Google Translate.

Another candy bowl involves a rectangular juice container as the head of Frankenstein, a robot or alien [<https://www.cutoutandkeep.net/projects/halloween-candy-holder>]. You cut a big mouth in the front of the container and the kids reach into the mouth to get the candy.

Foliage-Based Halloween Decorations from Recycled Materials

Next we'll talk about Halloween decorations you can put in the trees or shrubs in your yard.

My favorite tree-based craft is a skeleton made from recycled plastic milk jugs. I grew up in Canada so I never saw a plastic milk jug until I moved to the US when I was an adult. But if you live in a place with plastic milk jugs, this is a popular craft and there are lots of videos that show you how to do it. I'll link to the tutorial by the Houston Museum of Natural Science because their skeleton looks the most realistic [<http://blog.hmns.org/2015/10/halloween-how-to-make-a-spooky-skeleton-out-of-recycled-milk-jugs/>]. You use one jug for the head or skull, one for the rib-cage and then 2-3 more to make the legs, feet, arms and hands.

Broken ceiling fans are not easy to recycle. That will need to be a future podcast episode! Sadie Seasongood cut each blade in two pieces and made two ghost shapes [<https://www.sadieseasongoods.com/ghost-ornaments/>]. Her ceiling fan blades were already white, but if yours are not, you could paint them. She used clear mono-filament thread to hang the ghosts so they look like they are floating.

You can make cute ghost windsocks from recycled cans [<https://chickenscratchny.com/2016/09/diy-tin-can-ghost-windsock.html>]. You paint the cans white, turn them upside-down and paint on black eyes and mouth. You add strips of white fabric hanging down from the can.

You can tie a giant rope spider web in tree branches. I recommend rope over yarn so the web is more visible at night. Be sure not to tie it across a space where kids might run as they go from house to house. A great way to tie the web is to make it across your kitchen table first and then carry it out to the tree. I will link to a step-by-step tutorial [<https://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/make-and-decorate/entertaining/how-to-make-a-large-spider-web-for-halloween-pictures>].

And where can you find a giant spider for your web? Do you remember my spider web costume which I made from hundreds of six-pack rings and tent poles? I made my spider from those black plastic trays found in frozen dinners.

Front Porch Decorations from Recycled Materials

These next decorations are meant for your front yard. They are made inexpensively and are heavy enough that you could have them on your porch for the weeks leading up to Halloween.

I mentioned the skeleton made from recycled milk jugs. Another use of milk jugs involves lining them up, adding ghost faces with black paint, and then stringing white holiday lights inside. It looks like a line of ghosts. You can download a bunch of face templates in the show notes [<https://www.isavea2z.com/easy-halloween-craft-ideas-milk-jug-ghosts/>].

There is an Instructables tutorial that shows how to make a realistic skull from recycled milk jugs [<https://www.instructables.com/id/Milk-Jug-Skulls/>], but it is really next-level creative reuse. It requires owning a resin skull that you use as a base, and then you use a heat gun to melt the milk jugs over the base. Finally you do some rather fancy painting. But if you wanted to make a bunch of these skulls to sell, this is a really cool project.

Another thing you can do with those string lights involves those plastic K-cups from Keurig coffee makers. You take the white ones and draw a ghost face, then attach one on each light [<https://www.thekimsixfix.com/2014/10/k-cup-recycled-garland-ghosts-by-day.html>]. As an aside, I made a whole zebra costume from those black and white K-cups which you can hear about in my episode on costumes.

Have you noticed the big orange plastic jugs used by liquid laundry detergent brands? If you can remove the labels, you can use them to make a stylized pumpkin. Unfortunately, these labels can be difficult to remove without serious chemicals like acetone. But if you have found a way to remove them in a way that is less toxic, please let me know!

I made a Halloween wreath last year from old black socks. I cut the socks into strips and then tied them on a metal circle. It used up a bunch of old socks and looked suitably creepy.

My daughter made a cool nail-and-thread skull decoration on a piece of wood that I salvaged from the trash. We got the idea from the blog called A Beautiful Mess [<https://abeautifulmess.com/2013/10/make-your-own-skull-string-art.html>]. The wood was a about 3 feet square. We painted it black, then printed a greatly enlarged image of a skull. She tapped in finishing nails all along the lines, then connected the nails with white thread. You could also project the image of clip-art on the wood rather than printing out a pattern.

Have you ever made a luminaria from a recycled metal can? It's great practice using a hammer and nail for the kids. You fill a can with water and freeze it into a solid chunk of ice. Then you draw a design on the can with marker. You can also print out a design and tape it on the can, and the kids can tap the nails right through the paper. You let the ice melt, then put a candle inside. You can punch out the words Trick or Treat, or Boo. Some people paint the cans orange or black for Halloween. Coffee cans work well for this craft because they are larger and stronger than other metal cans.

My local thrift store had a volunteer who would fix up all the donated Barbies to make them presentable. But if you had Barbies that were beyond fixing, you could make them into Zombie Barbies [<https://craftsbyamanda.com/barbie-zombies-the-walking-dead/>]. That's an idea from Crafts from Amanda. This would be a great craft for your older children who are done with their Barbies but you just haven't found someone who wants them. They get to paint the Barbies with gray and brown paint, tease their hair and set them up on your porch in a zombie display. They also can dye the clothes a duller color and splatter red paint on them.

Crafts by Amanda has another great craft which involves painting monster faces on rocks with glow-in-the-dark paint [<https://craftsbyamanda.com/glow-in-the-dark-monster-rocks/>]. This one is on my to-do list.

If you want to get really ambitious with your outdoor decorations, I suggest recycled wood pallets. You can build spooky Halloween fences and graveyards from recycled wood pallets [<http://sewwoodsy.com/2012/09/halloween-wood-pallet-fence.html>], as well as directional signage that points left and right saying things like "Dracula Drive," "Halloween Highway" and "Wicked Witch Way."

Indoor Halloween Decorations from Recycled Materials

This category of decorations is great if you are hosting a Halloween party. These could also be used to decorate your porch on Halloween night, but most of these ideas involve items that are breakable or could blow away in the wind, so they are not a good idea to leave out for the weeks leading up to Halloween. A lot of these decoration ideas could also be good activity ideas for a Halloween party if you host a party with people who like to make crafts.

Here our third Sadie Seasongood recycled Halloween craft! She took old figurines and made them look haunted by painting them black and then giving them red eyes [<https://www.sadieseasongoods.com/haunted-figurines/>]. What a great idea since there are just too many knick knacks in the world. It's especially effective if the original knick knack was supposed to be cute like a teddy bear or a little girl with pony tails.

Yet another Sadie Seasongoods craft is a spider's web from a recycled doily [<https://www.sadieseasongoods.com/creepy-crawly-crochet-spider-web-doilies/>]. You stretch the doily on an embroidery hoop and add a little spider – maybe hanging down from the web by a string.

And our last Sadie Seasongoods craft involves those frosted glass light covers that you might see in a bathroom covering the light bulb. If you go to a place like a Habitat for Humanity Restore, you can get them cheap. Sadie shows how the glass light covers look like ghosts when they are sitting on a shelf if you add eyes and a mouth [<https://www.sadieseasongoods.com/ghoulish-illumination-light-cover-ghosts/>]. She puts glow sticks inside, but you could string reusable plug-in lights.

The blog Just Crafty Enough made a graveyard terrarium [<http://www.justcraftyenough.com/2011/10/iron-craft-challenge-40-graveyard-terrarium/>]. This is a variation on a popular craft which involves a recycled glass jar with a little scene inside, and usually some small plants. For this craft, you put a dried out branch that looks like a dead tree, a little gravestone made from Sculpey and some dried hay along the bottom. It's rather desolate but hilarious. This could also be a great craft for your guests to make-and-take.

Another theme I have seen at Halloween parties is to have unusual items displayed in glass jars. The blog Craft Your Happiness shows how to make those old-timey looking jars – called cloches or bell jars – but these are made from recycled clear, two liter soda bottles [<https://craftyourhappiness.com/2014/06/30/bell-jar-display-tutorial/>]. Inside the jars, they displayed pretend dragon eggs or bird models or other kind of creepy items.

In my episode on the creative reuse of prescription bottles, I shared a Halloween craft that is a potions bottle [<http://magiamia.blogspot.com/2013/08/its-glue-gun-plastic-time-again.html>]. This is a great reuse of small plastic bottles like those used for medications. It involves using a glue gun to add words like “Poison” or “Eye of Newt” and then you paint over that 3-dimensional stuff with layers of paint to make it look old. My son did this in his Harry Potter Club so this could also be a good craft activity for a party.

In my episode on creative reuse of glass jars, I talked about making lanterns with silhouettes of Halloween scenes. You can paint the jar orange or cover it with tissue paper, then add a black silhouette. The blog called Le Coin de Mel shows silhouette designs that you could borrow [<https://lecoindemel.com/upcycled-halloween-lanterns-10-minute-crafts/>].

When I was a tween, I liked to do cross-stitching. I found a cute craft by Martha Stewart Living which involves cross-stitch skeletons made with glow-in-the-dark thread. This would be a very cute craft made on a scrap of black fabric [<https://www.marthastewart.com/1507168/cross-stitch-skeletons>]. I was thinking it could be a cute party gift if you made them and stretched them on the bands that go around Mason jars or large metal lids.

That skeleton cross-stitch is actually very cute – and other cute Halloween decoration are pom poms that look like eye balls [<https://mrprintables.com/blog/lets-make-halloween-pompoms/>]. The Mr. P blog has a very helpful tutorial that shows how to make them. It also shows how to make a skull pom pom although that looks beyond my skill level. This is a great way to use up yarn bits.

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! I would love to hear what you think about making Halloween decorations from recycled materials at trashmagination@gmail.com. Until next time – may you decorate for Halloween with lots of recycled materials!