



## Trashmagination Podcast #63 – Gift Wrapping

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

In this episode, we'll talk about gift wrap that doesn't become trash. You probably have heard about wrapping gifts in fabric or paper bags, but I'm going to share ideas that take it to the next level – so get inspired for the holiday season!

There are many benefits to switching from wrapping paper to alternatives. You can:

- Save money - Americans spend more than \$7 billion on wrapping paper each year<sup>1</sup>.
- Avoid frustration – Putting a gift in a reusable gift bag takes less time and coordination than wrapping with scissors and tape. Also, fabric bags usually work better when you are wrapping gifts that have an unusual shape.
- Help the environment – If every American family wrapped 3 presents in reusable materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields<sup>2</sup>.

Many types of paper gift wrapping are recyclable by municipal recycling programs except the kinds with foil or glitter. But plastic tape is not recyclable. Tissue paper is challenging because it is often made from already-recycled paper and has shorter fibers. Even though many municipal recycling programs take wrapping paper, it is filled with ink. Many inks are not made from sustainable ingredients. Removing the ink requires chemicals to prepare the fibers for reuse. So avoiding wrapping paper is a good decision for the environment.

Of course overall, it's best to give fewer material gifts and instead give gifts that are experiences. But for those items you want to wrap, this is the podcast episode to inspire you!

### Furoshiki and Fabric Gift Bags

A much better idea is to wrap gifts in fabric. If you want to wrap with fabric but you don't want to use a sewing machine, come learn about furoshiki which means "wrapping cloth" in Japanese. In the show notes, I will link to a tutorial made by the Japanese Environmental Ministry that shows how to tie furoshiki in step-by-step graphics to fit different shapes and sizes of gifts [<http://www.env.go.jp/en/focus/attach/060403-5.html>].

I love furoshiki but I have more experience with fabric gift bags. My family has been wrapping gifts in the same fabric bags for almost 40 years! Fabric gift bags have many different ways to stay closed, such as drawstrings, hook and loop fasteners like Velcro® brand fastener, belt loops, ribbon or buttons. I just learned about a great creative reuse option involves holding the bag closed with a circle of t-shirt fabric from a recycled t-shirt.

Fabric gift bags can be made from fabric scraps or secondhand clothing. They are a great project for a beginner learning how to use a sewing machine. I will link to some tutorials [<http://www.spoolofthread.com/2012/12/18/giftbagtutorial/>].

Another fabric gift bag idea involves creatively reusing the sleeve from a shirt that you don't want anymore [<https://makeanddocrew.com/tutorial-how-to-use-an-old-shirt-as-gift-wrap/>] You slide the gift into the sleeve and then tie ribbons on each side of the gift, or sew the sleeve at the end which doesn't have a cuff.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.marketplace.org/2016/12/26/life/used-wrapping-paper-not-much-gift-recycling-market>

<sup>2</sup> [http://bgm.stanford.edu/pssi\\_faq\\_holiday\\_waste](http://bgm.stanford.edu/pssi_faq_holiday_waste)

## **Buying Fabric Gift Bags**

If you don't want to sew your own reusable fabric gift wrap, many small businesses make them. Search with the term "reusable gift wrap" or "bento bag." Unfortunately, most do not seem to use recycled fabrics.

Enfold, located in Michigan, offers two kinds of sustainable fabric gift bags. They offer bags from recycled saris by women who used to work in the sex trade in India [<http://www.enfoldgiftwrap.com/upcycled/>]. They also sell wraps made from organic cotton.

Wrag Wrap in the UK [<https://www.wragwrap.com>] makes their gift bags from polyester made from recycled plastic bottles. They sell a reusable gift wrap called Crackle Wrap which contains a layer that crinkles as the gift is unwrapped.

## **Flexible Food Packaging Gift Bags**

Here's a gift wrapping idea that involves a sewing machine but not fabric. A few years ago, I started sewing together food packaging such as juice pouches and similar bags to make gift bags [<https://trashmagination.com/making-with-juice-pouches-flexible-food-packaging/>]. There is an increasing number of food products sold in these types of bags. I call them flexible food packaging. I found almost all of them can be sewn on my regular sewing machine – not an industrial one – and can be sewn with normal needles and thread. They can be more challenging to sew than fabric because they don't always fold as easily to push through sewing machine. But the final result is a gift bag that often gets a big reaction. I started making these as bags for teacher appreciation week. I fill them with snacks or personal care items. You can add handles or not. The only type of flexible food packaging that didn't work so far has been those from potato chips. It rips too easily even when I attached a lining or interfacing to them.

## **Mylar Balloons**

Mylar balloons are the type that you fill with helium. They are not recyclable. I avoid buying these but sometimes you receive one as a gift or there are a bunch leftover at the end of a school event. One great way to reuse mylar balloons is to wrap gifts with them [<http://junkmailgemsblog.blogspot.com/2009/04/what-to-do-with-mylar-balloons.html>].

## **Holiday Tins and Boxes**

Do you have any holiday tins from previous holidays? These are a great way to gift handmade cookies, but they can be a great gift wrapping option for many items.

For very small gifts, you can make a gift box from a recycled toilet paper roll. You just flatten the roll and tuck in the ends, then wrap in ribbon [<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/how-to-make-a-toilet-paper-roll-gift-box-1388621>].

My mom has also made these types of gift boxes from recycled holiday cards. Her gift boxes were triangular, like little pyramids [<https://craftyjournal.com/gift-box-patterns/>] but you can also make them into rectangular boxes.

## **Plastic Clamshell Packaging and Juice Cartons**

In episode 51, I talked about a type of plastic packaging that is rarely recycled by municipal recycling programs – and it was called clamshell packaging. This is the type with a lid that pops open. In my area, they are often used for berries. These can be great gift boxes as well [<http://www.auntpeaches.com/2012/05/friday-flowers-kaleidoscopic-berry.html>]. Most are transparent, but you can make them into colorful gift boxes by gluing on tissue paper with watered-down white glue. I also saw colorful gift boxes made from recycled orange juice cartons [<https://myria.com/how-to-make-juice-carton-gift-boxes>].

## **Paper Wrapping**

If you really want to wrap with paper, you can choose the classic brown paper bags, book pages, newspapers or magazines. You can also consider reusing your children's artwork or printed maps. But this just seems so unimaginative after the other options I mentioned.

## Gift Tag Ideas

Another aspect of gift wrapping are gift tags. My family typically makes gift tags from recycled holiday cards or cereal boxes. I have also seen gift tags made from wood with chalkboard paint on them. Postcardigans in North Carolina makes reusable gift tags from vintage postcards. On the back they paint chalk paint [<https://www.etsy.com/listing/230015793/reusable-gift-tags-set-of-18-chalk-paint>].

I designed a reusable gift tag and you can see the step-by-step photos and instructions at [trashmagination.com](http://trashmagination.com) [<https://trashmagination.com/reusable-gift-tag-and-bow/>]. I modeled it from a luggage tag. The clear plastic part is cut from a piece of plastic packaging. The felt is made from recycled soda bottles. I decided to make the gift tag attach to fabric bags with a button and button hole. I had never sewn a button hole with my sewing machine before but I figured it out. The advantage of the button hole is that you don't have to pin it to the fabric bag or tie it to the drawstring cords.

## Gift Bows from Recycled Materials

There are many tutorials showing how to fold paper to make a gift bow. Other ideas involve tying used balloons, old holiday lights with big bulbs [<http://lilygeek.blogspot.com/2011/12/how-am-i-going-to-make-my-xmas-wrapping.html>], bells, pompoms made from scrap yarn or t-shirt yarn [<http://www.craftaholicsanonymous.net/t-shirt-pom-poms-tutorial>] or really any fun personalized object! It's amazing what you can make with only a few scraps of paper. I'll link to a blog where they put a little forest of evergreen trees on top of a present made from tiny bits of green paper and toothpicks [<http://thehousethatlarsbuilt.com/2013/11/5-gift-topper-ideas.html/>].

Here are gift wrapping ideas for long skinny fabric scraps. You can bunch up the fabric scrap as you push it through your sewing machine, and it makes a long ruffle [[https://cosmocricquet.typepad.com/cosmo\\_cricquet/2012/12/8-techniques-for-gift-wrapping-with-kraft.html](https://cosmocricquet.typepad.com/cosmo_cricquet/2012/12/8-techniques-for-gift-wrapping-with-kraft.html)]. Another idea involves weaving ribbons or fabric strips over and under each other around a gift. The weaving doesn't cover the gift completely, but makes a beautiful design [<http://thehousethatlarsbuilt.com/2018/05/ribbon-weaving-gift-wrap.html/>].

I designed a bow from the bottom of a 2 liter green plastic soda bottle. The bottom of many soda bottles have bumps. If you cut the last inch of the bottle, you get something that looks like a flower. I drilled 2 holes in the center and added a red plastic cap as the center of the flower.

## Pass the Parcel Game

Have you ever played the party game called Pass the Parcel? Treats are wrapped in many layers of wrapping. The game players sit in a circle. You play music and whoever is holding the package must do a challenge that is written on the layer. It might say "Do 20 jumping jacks." Once you do the challenge, you get to remove the layer. Unfortunately, this usually results in a giant pile of paper waste! It would be a cool project to sew bags that fit inside each other from secondhand fabric as an alternative way to play this game.

## Thank you!

Thank you for listening! I would love to hear what you do your gift wrapping without creating trash at [trashmagination@gmail.com](mailto:trashmagination@gmail.com). Until next time – may you see creative reuse gift wrapping as a source of art in your life!