



Trashmagination Podcast #70 – Coffee Pods or Capsules & Coffee Grounds

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

In today's episode, we'll talk about the trash we make when we drink coffee. I hope this topic will help you wake up to the possibilities of creative reuse! There are many types of trash created by our love of coffee, but in this episode, we'll focus on two kinds. The first is coffee pods or capsules made from plastic or aluminum. They go inside specialized machines to make a single cup of coffee. The second type of coffee-based trash we'll talk about is coffee grounds.

Coffee Pods or Capsules – K-Cups and Nespresso Pods

Now I remember when my workplace first brought in this newfangled type of coffee machine called Keurig around the year 2000. It seemed like magic that you pop in this thing called a K-Cup, press a button and fresh coffee poured out. The K-Cup then disappeared into the machine! But of course they didn't really disappear, so I wanted to know – where did the K-Cups go? I figured out how to open the machine and inside I saw a bunch of damp K-Cups.

I was shocked by the amount of plastic they produced! I started to collect the K-Cups, bring them home and empty the grounds into my compost. This involved using a knife to remove the tinfoil tops and scraping out the grounds. Obviously this was not a sustainable project given how much coffee my colleagues drank. I decided I wanted to reach out to my colleagues about this issue in a creative way, so I decided to make my Halloween costume from K-Cups.

The first Halloween costume I made from K-Cups was an octopus. I took the plastic K-Cups that I had cleaned and pinned them to the arms of four gray sweatshirts which I stuffed. I put all the sweatshirts on at the same time so I had 8 arms.

Another year, I made a zebra costumes from K-Cups. I saved black and white capsules and pinned them all over my body in black and white stripes. I made a zebra head from a recycled plastic milk jug.

Unfortunately neither my composting nor my costumes caused people to stop using K-Cups. But the times they are a-changing. It has now been almost 20 years, and people seem to be realizing that single-use plastics are a terrible idea. Many people are switching to a washable metal pod or compostable pods. Two companies that make compostable pods are Glory Brew (<https://www.instagram.com/glorybrew/>) and Halo (https://www.instagram.com/halo_coffee_co/).

Metal reusable pod - video - <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=346971459368777>

There is another type of coffee capsule made by the company Nespresso. I noticed on Pinterest that many creative reuse artists were making items from Nespresso pods. These are different from K-Cups because they are made from aluminum instead of plastic. Since they come in many colors and hold the shape when you fold them, they are made into an amazing variety of beautiful jewelry and other crafts. I saved many examples to a Pinterest board for you - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/coffee-grounds-pods-cans/>.

- Nespresso jewelry on Etsy - https://www.etsy.com/market/nespresso_jewelry
- Nespresso jewelry video tutorial - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7In_E3oSLo
- Alex Aebi's insects from pods - <https://alexaebi.com/recycleandplay/upcycling/>

You would think that the Nespresso capsules are better than K-Cups for the environment because aluminum does not degrade in quality as you recycle it, unlike plastic. However Nespresso pods cannot be put into the recycling bin in most

places. The pods are smaller than soda cans, so the recycling facilities are not set up to sort them, and they fall through the machines. My friend Miranda says that when she buys her Nespresso pods, they come with a bag that you put the used pods into, and then you mail them to Nespresso for recycling. I read that in many places you can bring the pods to a Nespresso boutique or there is a program involving flower shops in Australia¹.

I wish that the people who used Nespresso pods would look at the incredible things you can make with them. On Etsy, there is a market for clean empty Nespresso pods as crafters look for specific colors and patterns for their crafts. So if you use these pods, consider saving them for creative reuse by these crafters and they might even buy certain types.

If you watch the TV show *Grace and Frankie* which stars Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda, then you have seen some awesome jewelry made from Nespresso pods by Kathleen Nowak Tucci [<https://www.instagram.com/kathleennowaktucci/>]. The character played by Lily Tomlin wears this jewelry in Season 6 [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BthhSljllqf/>]. Kudos to the show's costume designer Allyson Fanger for featuring creative reuse art as a way of expressing this character's personality. Kathleen Nowak Tucci also makes jewelry from recycled rubber and if you are interested in that check out my episode last month on recycling inner tubes.

You know I love researching trash fashion, or clothing made from recycled materials more for artistic expression than as actual clothing you would wear every day. There have been incredible trash fashion outfits made from K-Cups and Nespresso pods. You can check out these designs on the Pinterest board I made for this episode.

- Sugarcoated dress from Nespresso pods by Shelley Scott - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtP6DkaBGLE/> - World of Wearable Art
- Dress made by Marynel Watters & Flavia Lovatelli as part of the 2016 ecoFAB Trash Couture show - <http://toddyoungbloodphotography.com/coffee-pods-dress-recycled-fashion-designs-ecofab>
- Erin Shannon Pennacchio wedding dress made from 500 K-Cups - <https://www.theknotnews.com/k-cup-couture-wedding-dress-11549>
- Nespresso Yourself – Junk Kouture 2014 - <https://lovebelfast.co.uk/fashion-competition-junkkouture-start-search-for-2014-young-designers/>

There are lots of children's crafts made from coffee capsules and pods. You can make ladybugs, trolls, snowmen, whales and a bunch of other cute creatures by painting the pods and adding googly eyes. It's not the kind of crafts I typically make but I have collected ideas for my friends who are pre-school teachers and you can check that out on the Pinterest board. If you are looking for kids' crafts for St. Patrick's Day or Easter, I saw leprechaun hats, pots at the end of the rainbow, little chicks, bunnies, lambs – it seems like any animal, you could make a craft version with a K-Cup.

<https://whateverworks.typepad.com/whatever-works/2013/11/k-cup-christmas-countdown-calendar.html>

Another way that artists creatively reuse Nespresso capsules is to make portraits. So as I said, these pods come in just about any color. People collect them in all shades and then make a portrait where each pod represents a pixel in a pixelated image. I found an adorable story about an art club in the United Kingdom that made a portrait of the Queen of England from Nespresso pods [<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-36265535>].

Nespresso pods have also been used in other artwork that involves dots. You might be familiar with the traditional artwork done by Aboriginal artists in Australia which involves a lot of painted dots. John Kundereri Moriarty is an indigenous Australian artist who has received the Order of Australia. He made art with traditional motifs but instead of using paint, he used Nespresso pods. So be sure to check out these art pieces on the Pinterest board I made.

¹ <https://www.1millionwomen.com.au/blog/recycling-your-coffee-pods-nespresso-recycling-scheme-working/>

Coffee Grounds

Next we'll talk about creative reuse of coffee grounds. When coffee-drinkers visit me, we put their coffee grounds in our compost. But there are lots of more creative ways to reuse coffee grounds.

Let's start with how people use coffee grounds as part of a personal care regimen. I don't have experience with facial masks, but many websites and body product companies talk about using coffee grounds in a scrub. This usually involves combining coffee grounds with olive oil, coconut oil or even milk. Some companies also sell products which contain coffee grounds. Apparently coffee is a natural astringent, which means a chemical that causes body tissues to constrict. So coffee grounds tighten your pores and reduce inflammation. Coffee can be an exfoliant for rubbing off dead skin cells.

- Soap - <https://www.popsugar.com/smart-living/How-Make-Coffee-Ground-Soap-30647666>
- Salt Scrub - <http://www.savynaturalista.com/2013/11/01/coffee-salt-scrub/>
- Trashy Beauty Co. [<https://trashybeautyco.wixsite.com/home>]

Coffee absorbs smells similar to how baking soda work, so it can be used in your kitchen for that purpose. Some people make little cakes from coffee grounds to put in their garbage disposal or fridge [<https://www.popsugar.com/smart-living/Coffee-Grounds-Garbage-Disposal-Cleaners-34888912>].

Another way to creatively reuse coffee grounds is to use it as a wood stain to touch up scratches in wood furniture. It can act as a fabric dye or watercolor paint. Some fine artists specialize in painting with watercolor paint made from coffee grounds. If you search on the hashtag #coffeepainting on Instagram, you will find more than 44,000 posts.

- Furniture scratches - <https://newengland.com/today/living/home-repair-diy/wood-furniture-scratches/>
- Stain or Paint - <http://www.lovepomegranatehouse.com/steel-wool-coffee-grounds-vinegar-stain/>

One to check out is Indonesian artist Ghidaq al-Nizar who shares his work at the Instagram account @coffeetopia [<https://www.instagram.com/coffeetopia/>]. He paints beautiful scenes on leaves with paint made from coffee grounds. He calls his art #zerowastecoffee, because it uses up every bit of leftover coffee.

Other artists use coffee grounds to make something called a "texture paste" which is a paste you can put on a painting or three-dimensional object to give it a rough surface.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZmcDwTqGks>

Companies Who Creatively Reuse Coffee Grounds into New Products

So those are ways you can creatively reuse coffee grounds at home, but there are some businesses who gather coffee grounds from coffee shops in much larger quantities than one household would produce. They transform the coffee grounds into surprising products.

Kaffeeform makes coffee cups from used coffee grounds [<https://www.kaffeeform.com>]. The cups are made from natural glues and wood particles combined with coffee grounds. They have stores in many European countries.

Video - <https://www.facebook.com/NowThisFuture/videos/2227859770588524/>

Bio-Bean is a company that makes coffee logs and biomass pellets from used coffee grounds [<http://www.bio-bean.com/>]. This company is based in the United Kingdom. I heard an interview with bio-bean on the podcast Trash Talking with Eco-Warriors which I will link to in the show notes [<https://trashtalkingecowarriors.fireside.fm/22>].

Both these companies are in Europe. If you know of companies doing similar things in other places, please let me know!

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! I would love to hear how you creatively reuse coffee pods or capsules, as well as coffee grounds at trashmagination@gmail.com. You might also be interested in episode 43 of this podcast about the creative reuse of

tea bags and why you should not put most tea bags directly in the compost without first researching your brand [https://trashmagination.com/teabags/]. Until next time – may you see coffee trash as a source of art in your life!

Tags

#recyclednespresso

#nespresso creations

#capsulenespresso

#ecojewelry

Repost Options

Necklace by @latelierdelriciclo - <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bq5PxJ4FFS7/>

Coffeetopia - <https://www.instagram.com/coffeetopia/>