



## Trashmagination Podcast #76 – Bubble Wrap

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

In today's episode, we'll talk about the creative reuse of bubble wrap. Bubble wrap was originally invented as a type of textured wallpaper in 1957<sup>1</sup>. The first prototype was made by pressing together shower curtains with air bubbles inside. The product did not sell as wallpaper, but a few years later, a marketer realized it could be a great cushion for shipping. In 1959, it was put into the packaging for early computers by IBM.

The website Packaging Technology Today says that bubble wrap sales increased by 7 percent in 2018. The global bubble wrap packaging market is almost 11 billion US dollars per year<sup>2</sup>. A big part of this growth is due to the increase of people shopping from home. So let's talk about ways that you could creatively reuse bubble wrap! As always, I made a Pinterest board with many of these ideas which you can access in the show notes

[<https://www.pinterest.com/trashmagination/bubble-wrap/>].

### Places to Take Your Unwanted Bubble Wrap

Step one in reducing bubble wrap is to reduce buying fragile items online. Is it possible to support a local business instead? If you receive a product wrapped in bubble wrap, consider contacting the company and asking them to use paper-based packaging.

If you still have too much bubble wrap, you can offer them on your local Buy Nothing group on Facebook. I posted padded envelopes and they were quickly taken by someone who ships items for her business. I also brought bubble wrap and packing pellets to a UPS store and they were quite happy to take my items for reuse.

Danny Seo is a creative reuse and upcycling personality and he has a video where he talks about giving his bubble wrap to his local thrift stores so they can package up breakables that sell

[<https://www.facebook.com/NaturallyDannyTV/videos/825024897834215/>].

If your local shipping company and thrift stores say "no" to bubble wrap, then the most important thing to remember is that *it should never go in your recycling bin*. Just like plastic bags, bubble wrap will tangle around the equipment and cause the recycling machinery to stop working. They have to turn everything off, climb in and clear out your bubble wrap, delaying how items get recycled and increasing the costs of recycling. So just like plastic bags, you could put your bubble wrap in the containers outside most grocery stores where they accept plastic bags<sup>3</sup>.

The company Sealed Air was the first one to produce bubble wrap, and they have a website about how to recycle bubble wrap [<https://sealedair.com/sustainability/recycling-bubble-wrap-plastic-paper-foam-packaging>] and they will accept any of their packaging for recycling if you mail it to them. But that's a lot of work so I recommend putting it in plastic bag recycling. Of course you need to make sure there is no tape on the bubble wrap.

### Crafts Made from Upcycled Bubble Wrap

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sparefoot.com/self-storage/blog/19966-stuff-about-stuff-the-accidental-history-of-bubble-wrap/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.packagingtechtoday.com/news-headlines/bubble-wrap-packaging-market-to-grow-at-7-04/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://livegreen.recyclebank.com/column/because-you-asked/is-bubble-wrap-recyclable>

Now let's look at ways to upcycle bubble wrap into crafts. The bubble wrap crafts I like the most involve making painted prints. You paint on the bubbles and then lay down a piece of paper or fabric. Bubble wrap can be used to mimic any repeated round design, such as honeycomb in a bees hive, raindrops, snow or scales on a snake, fish, mermaid, crocodile or dragon. One crafter made dandelion seed heads by painting white circles on bubble wrap. Each little dot of white paint becomes a dandelion seed.

- Printed flowers - <https://thepinterestedparent.com/2018/04/bubble-wrap-printed-flowers/>
- Honeycomb - <https://capturingparenthood.com/bubble-wrap-beehive-paper-bee-rings/>
- Snow - [https://www.daniellesplace.com/html/winter\\_crafts.html](https://www.daniellesplace.com/html/winter_crafts.html)
- Rain - [https://www.123homeschool4me.com/bubble-wrap-rain-craft\\_71](https://www.123homeschool4me.com/bubble-wrap-rain-craft_71)
- Snake scales - <https://www.daniellesplace.com/html/snakecrafts.html#snake>

For homeschoolers teaching about insects, you can make a representation of a compound eye from a house fly. You print out a really big picture of a fly and print with bubble wrap to represent the many facets of that compound eye [<https://www.daniellesplace.com/html/bugs.html>].

Cassie Stephens is an art teacher in Tennessee who hosts the podcast Everyday Art Room [<https://theartofeducation.edu/everydayartroom/>]. She talks a lot about creatively reusing materials in her classes. In episode 88 on Sculpture, she talks about making sculptures of glue bottles from shipping pillows [<https://theartofeducation.edu/podcasts/sculpture-ideas-for-the-art-room-ep-088/>], little air-filled pillows that replace bubble wrap. Each year, Cassie has a school-wide art show, and last year the theme was art supplies. Her fourth-graders made sculptures of glue from shipping pillows [<https://cassiestephens.blogspot.com/2018/01/in-art-room-spilled-glue-bottle.html>]. They added a little piece of white yarn to the orange tip of the glue bottle to represent glue spilling out. Other students made pencils, crayons and glue sticks from toilet paper rolls.

Another fun use of bubble wrap is to make a mold for homemade soap. You can make soap that looks like honeycomb by using bubble wrap. Some soaps also honey which is a nice tie-in [<https://www.hometalk.com/38085504/honey-comb-melt-and-pour-soap-recipe>].

There are many crafts which involve ironing plastic bags. The result is like an extra-thick plastic bag. These same techniques work with bubble wrap. When you iron bubble wrap, the resulting fused plastic looks a bit like mother-of-pearl shells. The bead designer Steven James wrote a tutorial for how to make bubble wrap jewelry in the book *Jewelry Upcycled* [[https://www.amazon.com/Jewelry-Upcycled-Techniques-Projects-Reusing/dp/0823099903/ref=sr\\_1\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/Jewelry-Upcycled-Techniques-Projects-Reusing/dp/0823099903/ref=sr_1_1)] and his tutorial is available online [<https://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=378142.0>]. You just iron layers of bubble wrap and then punch out whatever shape you want to make jewelry like bracelets and earrings [<https://www.epbot.com/2012/06/bubble-wrap-bracelet-rainbow-shells.html>]. Jen from Epbot punched out snowflake shapes to make earrings [<https://www.epbot.com/2012/06/icy-earrings-from-bubble-wrap.html>].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-paGUud4qiQ>

## Halloween Costumes with Bubble Wrap

Bubble wrap is similar to fabric in many ways so it has been used in many trash fashion designs and Halloween costumes. Here are some Halloween costume ideas to put in your idea file:

- Martha Stewart made a **jellyfish** costume from a clear umbrella and bubble wrap [<https://www.marthastewart.com/1521977/jellyfish-costume>].
- You can make Marg Simpson's tall blue hair from bubble wrap. [<http://mom2my6pack.blogspot.com/2007/10/youre-going-to-be-ghosts-this-year.html>].
- You can dress up as a **frog egg mass**. You just wrap yourself up in bubble wrap and then putting a toy frog on your shoulder. This idea comes from Callan Bentley, an assistant professor of geology at Northern Virginia Community College [<https://blogs.agu.org/mountainbeltway/2011/10/31/my-halloween-costume/>].
- You can make a set of **wings for a bee or fly costume** from bubble wrap.

## Artists Who Incorporate Bubble Wrap into their Work

Next we'll talk about artists who incorporate bubble wrap into their work.

One of the coolest bubble wrap artists is Bradley Hart [<https://www.bradleyhart.ca/>] who makes pointillist paintings by injecting paint into the bubbles. He takes an image – like a famous painting or photograph – and pixelates it. He mixes the exact colors and then injects the color in the correct order into each bubble to make the whole image. He preloads about thousands syringes with the colors he needs. Hart also displays the back of the paintings in his shows, where you can see drips of paint coming out of the injection spots. The backs look like warped versions of the front. I once taught elementary kids about the pointillist artist Seurat and Bradley's work is like a Seurat.

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

Alicia Wee paints bubble wrap, but not by injecting into it. She paints the surface of the bubbles [<https://www.aeeloulalei.com/>]. Her art reminds me of the paintings by Roy Lichtenstein which were like comic strip panels blown up to a huge size with all the little dots from the printing process. She paints with really bright colors, mostly portraits.

The design firm Lo Siento played with injecting liquid into bubble wrap, but instead of paint, they injected colorful water. They made letters resulting in a really cool font [<https://www.designboom.com/design/bubble-wrap-typography-by-lo-siento/>]. They called this 4-D art because it can be viewed from so many angles.

Next let's talk about fashion designers. Helmut Lang made a bubble wrap jacket in his Spring/Summer 2003 collection. Moschino included a bubble wrap dress in their Fall 2017 Ready-to-Wear collection [<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-ready-to-wear/moschino/slideshow/collection#50>].

Suzanne Jongmans also made clothing from bubble wrap, but it was not current fashion. She re-created many medieval and Renaissance clothing styles with bubble wrap and other shipping materials [<https://www.suzannejongmans.nl/mind-over-matter>]. She re-created the pose and appearance of women in famous paintings. It makes you look twice because first you think it's a classic painting, but then you see the bubble wrap.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb2B34p1q0c>

In 2012, Makoto Orisaki made huge trees made from bubble wrap [<https://www.designboom.com/design/puti-puti-bubble-wrap-trees-by-makoto-orisaki/>]. He worked with students to make a whole woodland in a museum. First they made trunks from cardboard covered with plaster. Then they layered it with bubble wrap to create textures. Sometimes they would melt the bubble wrap with heat guns to make new textures.

Luca Gnizio [NEE-zoo] is an ecosocial designer who recycles many materials and his current project involves making storage containers from padded envelopes [<https://www.lucagnizio.com/en/default.aspx>]. He was a finalist in the Ro Plastic Prize for 2019 with his designs [<https://www.guiltlessplastic.com/plastic-prize/>] which is a contest to inspire designers to use recycled plastic.

## Thank you!

Thank you for listening! So here's a question. Which way should bubble wrap face when wrapping fragile items? Should the bubbles face in, or out? Most websites seem to say that the bubbles should face in to best protect your item and because it's easier to tape the flat side than the bubble side. But I read that some people put the smooth side in to avoid having the imprint of bubbles on their product if it's a book or clothing. What do you think? Please let me know at [trashmagination@gmail.com](mailto:trashmagination@gmail.com). Until next time – may you see bubble wrap as a source of art in your life!

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Instagram accounts that feature upcycled bubble wrap

- Bradley Hart - <https://www.instagram.com/bradleyhartnyc/>
- Alicia Wee - <https://www.instagram.com/aleeloulalei/>
- Suzanne Jongmans - <https://www.instagram.com/suzannejongmans/>
- Luca Gnizio - <https://www.instagram.com/luca.gnizio.ecosocial/>