



Trashmagination Podcast #77 – Cosmetics

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

In today's episode, we'll talk about creative reuse of cosmetics. There are three topics to consider when creatively reusing cosmetics:

- 1) Most makeup comes in plastic containers.
- 2) A lot of makeup contains toxic chemicals and tiny plastic beads called microbeads
[\[https://www.beatthemicrobead.org/\]](https://www.beatthemicrobead.org/).
- 3) Even non-toxic makeup expires in a relatively short time.

So let's talk through these issues and how it impacts creative reuse of cosmetics. We'll talk about making your own cosmetics. And I'll share stories of three artists who creatively reuse cosmetics in their work.

Avoid Plastic Packaging in Cosmetics

You can tell at a glance whether your cosmetics come in a plastic package. But did you know there are options that are not packaged in plastic? For example, Elate Cosmetics has bamboo packaging. You can hear a great interview with Melodie Reynolds, the founder of Elate Cosmetics, on the podcast Zero Waste Countdown [\[https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/the-zero-waste/25-elate-cosmetics-iOVWUZJ082y/\]](https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/the-zero-waste/25-elate-cosmetics-iOVWUZJ082y/). Some other cosmetics come in metal packaging like Makeup Geek [\[https://www.makeupgeek.com/\]](https://www.makeupgeek.com/). Some cosmetics come in glass bottles and that's a good thing if you are going to keep reusing the glass bottle. But increasingly in my region, the recycling programs for glass cannot find enough markets, so even though it would seem like glass is a better option than plastic, it's still not great if you keep buying the product over and over in a new glass bottle.

Some cosmetic companies have packaging takeback programs such as Aveda, Origins or MAC Cosmetics. They have incentive programs such as giving you a free tube of lipstick when you bring back six empty ones. Some of these companies partner with Terracycle, which is a company that finds a way to recycle difficult to recycle items. They have a Personal Care and Beauty Recycling Program sponsored by Garnier [\[https://www.terracycle.com/en-US/brigades/personal-care-and-beauty-brigade-r\]](https://www.terracycle.com/en-US/brigades/personal-care-and-beauty-brigade-r). If you can collect these packages in large quantities at a school or other large community, your organization can earn money doing it. However, if you can choose between products in plastic or not plastic, definitely choose not plastic. Then you don't have to remember to bring packaging anywhere.

Some companies make packaging from recycled plastic, glass or aluminum. For example, Axiology sells lipstick in tubes made from recycled aluminum [\[https://axiologybeauty.com/\]](https://axiologybeauty.com/). While it's great they are creating markets for recycled materials, the best option is always reuse over recycling.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPZBV8X3DBs>

Is Your Makeup Toxic?

Unfortunately, a large proportion of cosmetics contain toxic chemicals. If you buy cosmetics in non-plastic packaging, chances are good that this company is also offering a non-toxic product. But if your cosmetics are in plastic packaging, be sure to find out if they also contain toxic chemicals. The app Think Dirty lets you scan a product to see what it

contains. You can scan makeup you already own or you can scan makeup that you are considering purchasing in the store [<http://www.thinkdirtyapp.com/>].

If you find that your existing cosmetics contain toxic chemicals, it could put your health at risk. I did an episode a few weeks ago about Mardi Gras plastic beads. I was looking forward to talking about all the fun crafts you can make with those beads, only to learn that they contain lots of toxic chemicals. If your cosmetics contain toxic chemicals, take them to the place where you take your paints and other toxic chemicals at your local waste management center.

Cosmetics Expire Rapidly

So let's say you have scanned your cosmetics and you find out they don't contain toxic chemicals. The next challenge is that like food, cosmetics have a shelf life. Some items like foundation, eye shadow and blush last about two years, but lipstick lasts only a year. Eye makeup is supposed to be replaced every three months. Many people keep their makeup far longer than those recommended timelines, and they are putting themselves at risk for eye and skin infections.

How do you know the recommended length of time to use a cosmetic product? There is a little symbol on most makeup that looks like a jar with the lid opening and it contains a number. That number tells you how many months you should keep the item after opening the product. It's called the PAO or Period After Opening symbol [<https://www.insider.com/how-to-tell-if-makeup-is-expired-symbol-2017-4>].

But how could you remember when you first opened a cosmetic item? Here's an idea that I hope to do going forward. When my daughter was learning clarinet, her teacher suggested she write the date on the reed when she first started using it. That would help her track which reeds are broken in and best to play, and which are likely to break soon. Then she could strategize which reed to play at a big concert. So a similar system would be a good idea for makeup – to write a date on it when you first open it.

If you have new, unopened cosmetics that you don't want anymore, there are programs that take makeup such as Project Beauty Share [<https://projectbeautyshare.org/>], the Beauty Bus [<https://beautybus.org/>] and Give and Makeup in the UK [<https://www.carolinehirons.com/page-give-and-makeup>]. Many local shelters will also take cosmetics donations of new, unopened products.

Repairing Broken Makeup and Using Up Every Bit

What if you have non-toxic make-up that has not expired, but it is broken? You can repair it. Maybe you dropped the container and the makeup is now in crumbles. You crush it up until it is powder, then add a few drops of rubbing alcohol. You pat it down and then leave it so the alcohol evaporates. The makeup forms back into a nice solid cake.

To use up tiny bits of lipstick, you can creatively reuse them by mixing up the bits with petroleum jelly or multiple lipsticks to form a new color and putting them into a jar or an Altoid tin [<https://www.buzzfeed.com/hillaryreinsberg/14-easy-ways-to-recycle-repurpose-and-revive-your>]. If your lipstick breaks off, melt the broken piece back on to the remaining bit with a lighter and it will work like new.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOOF8cneJqI>

One way to reduce the amount of trash caused by cosmetics is to use every little bit. There is a tool called a makeup spatula which is like a tiny cooking spatula which you can use to scoop down into the corners of the packaging. You can also cut off the ends of plastic tubes to access more of the product.

If there is a lot of product stuck to the sides of a tube or jar, put the tube or jar in a glass of warm water. The product stuck to the sides will slide down to the bottom. Then it is easier to access the product with brushes or to squirt it in your hand.

How to Creatively Reuse Expired Cosmetics

So here's another scenario – you have cosmetics that do not contain toxic chemicals but they expired. What can you do with them? A student in the UK had a cool idea which was to upcycle discarded eye shadow into paint. Ameenah Begum noticed that she could paint with cosmetics and it had a natural shimmer [<https://coswatercolours.co.uk/>]. She made a line of paints called Cos – spelled C-o-s. She gets her discarded eye shadow from cosmetic stores. Sometimes these are items which have been dropped on the floor or they are just discontinued colors. She crushes the eye shadow, mixes it with a pigment and then puts it into a watercolor palette.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2777731788934650>

On the blog “blah to TADA,” they mixed crushed-up eye shadow with white glue to make sparkly glue that they could use in craft projects [<https://blah-to-tada.blogspot.com/2010/06/animal-prints.html>].

Nail Polish and Nail Polish Remover

Now let's talk nail polish and nail polish remover. So most of these products contain toxic chemicals. You really have to do some research to find some that do not [<https://wellnessmama.com/17833/non-toxic-nail-polish/>]. Even the nail polishes that are listed as least toxic still contain a lot of bad chemicals and I wouldn't use them very often, especially with kids. The brand that is top rated by the Environmental Working Group is Acquarella [<https://acquarella.com/>]. Since it's a water-based products, it also uses a less toxic nail polish remover.

As I said, I would not encourage you to creatively reuse items that are toxic. However, there is a popular creative reuse project to use up nail polish which involves making marbled mugs or other dishes. You drip leftover nail polish in a bowl of water and then dip in a mug. That puts a marbled design on the mug. So you could give that a try, just be aware that most nail polishes are toxic and you likely don't want to put it on a dish that will hold food.

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

When I was a Girl Guide growing up in Canada, we used clear nail polish on matches to make them waterproof. We also put a drop of clear nail polish on a panty hose run to stop it from running further.

Mascara Wands

Here's a fun creative reuse project for mascara wands. Some wildlife rescue organizations collect mascara wands. Appalachian Wild has a program called Wands for Wildlife and they use the mascara wands to remove fly eggs and larva from the fur of wild animals. They had such a big response to this request that now they only accept wands two times per year – in October and February – which is when most orphaned baby wildlife need care

[<https://www.appalachianwild.org/wands-for-wildlife.html>]. In the UK, there is a program at the New Arc Center in Aberdeen. In Canada, there is a program called Project Wild Wands Canada

[<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Cause/Project-Wild-Wands-Canada-288041031628778/>].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enFEPuz36zU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMLISIM75Oc>

You can also creatively reuse a mascara wand as an eyebrow brush.

DIY Non-Toxic Makeup

Let's say that you have creatively reused all your store-bought cosmetics and you are ready for a fresh start. Get inspired by learning about how Bea Johnson manages her cosmetics. She wrote the book Zero Waste Home

[<https://zerowastehome.com/2010/01/20/zero-waste-bathroom/>]. She uses organic cocoa powder for blush!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YkbEp7Dz_o

There are many tutorials on how to make non-toxic cosmetics. In the show notes, I will link to them including how to make blush from beets [<https://zerowastenerd.com/diy-beet-blush/amp/>] and another one for making homemade eyeliner and mascara [<https://www.goingzerowaste.com/blog/zero-waste-eyeliner-and-mascara>].

Lip gloss - <https://youtu.be/R91OuaO82Wc>

Many people make face masks with products like bentonite clay. I researched how to make toothpaste with this clay but the tricky part was that I could only find it sold in a plastic container!

Even so, there are many benefits to making your own non-toxic cosmetics. Besides avoiding plastic packaging, you avoid toxic chemicals and you make only as much as you need so you don't have to throw it away. And in most cases, it will be a lot less expensive to buy items like cocoa powder over regular cosmetics.

Besides making your own cosmetics, you can also make your own cotton rounds for removing makeup. You can creatively reuse a flannel pillow case to make them [<https://www.litterless.com/journal/diycottonrounds>].

Artists Who Incorporate Cosmetics in Their Work

To finish up, here are artists who incorporate cosmetics in their work.

Red Hong Yi makes paintings from mascara wands, shavings from eyeliner pencils, false eyelashes, eye shadow, lipstick and nail polish [<https://www.buzzfeed.com/alannaokun/incredible-paintings-made-out-of-makeup>]. I mentioned her in the episode about creative reuse of chopsticks.

This spring, honors art students from Asheville High School in North Carolina made a very cool mosaic mural of an owl from mascara wands at the Asheville Museum of Science [<https://www.instagram.com/p/Buy1BDWBd9i/>] & [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BufBd5-B1jy/>]. This works because the plastic handles of the mascara wands come in all different colors.

Laurel Roth Hope [<https://loloro.com>] made sculptures of peacocks and other birds using fake plastic nails and nail polish [<https://inhabitat.com/exquisite-birds-of-paradise-made-thousands-of-recycled-barrettes-and-fake-nails/>]. These items were overstock or expired products. She also added bling in the form of hair barrettes and costume jewelry from estate sales.

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Please let me know about any other ideas for creatively reusing makeup and nail polish at trashmagination@gmail.com.

If you live in northern Virginia in the United States, this weekend on Sunday June 2, Trashmagination will be at the Maker Faire NoVa. My family has built an igloo from plastic jugs which we call the Jugloo. We will be located on the 2nd floor of the MIX Building at George Mason University. I hope you'll come by and talk with the Scouts from Troop 1577 who will be talking about reducing plastic pollution. Until next time – may you see cosmetics as a source of art in your life!

Instagram accounts that feature cosmetic creative reuse

- Cos watercolor paint - <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk1TouYnlwf/> - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BkPyr5XHSQJ/>
- Red Hong Yi mascara wand painting - https://www.instagram.com/p/j_cQWorPNy/
- Wands for Wildlife - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BTnDXEWF27k/>