

# Creative recycling

All manner of familiar household objects can find a new lease of life in a bustling and imaginative early years setting, explains **Wendy Bowkett...**

**O**ur craft room cupboard had large boxes on the floor, containing tubes, plastic food containers, cardboard, fabric and assorted paper, including some rolls of unwanted wallpaper. The shelves above held stacks of different types of paper and card, alongside ice cream and margarine tubs with lids. Each of these were filled with smaller pieces of craft materials: all the colours of the rainbow and easily accessible. There were tubs of cotton reel inners, plastic film containers, buttons and large beads (from broken costume jewellery), till roll centre tubes, shells, pebbles and lots more.

We 'upcycled' almost anything brought into nursery. Whenever a craft activity had finished, children loved to sort the remaining, reusable pieces of paper, card and fabric into colours to put into the appropriate colour tub. Leftover tubes and suchlike were replaced in their corresponding receptacles too. Sorting activities like this act as precursors to more sophisticated thinking skills such as sequencing, attributing, categorising and classifying. Any really small pieces were then discarded in appropriate bins for our 'dustbin' recycling, another valuable learning experience.

It's impossible to cover all the household items that can be repurposed for early years use in a few hundred words, so as there are plenty of cardboard tube inners around most preschool settings, I thought I'd offer a few imaginative ways in which they can be used. There was a great debate many years ago when Lady Diana Spencer (who worked in childcare before becoming a princess) helped children make things with toilet roll inner tubes at the preschool where she worked. If you feel strongly that they shouldn't be used for health and hygiene reasons then there are many other tubes around which can be cut to size if required...

**1** Imagine a campsite with large carpet roll inners and poster tubes cut or sawn to make seats and logs for a campfire. Binoculars for bird-watching can be made from smaller tubes taped together and painted; longer tubes that fit inside each

other and moved can be made into a telescope for watching the night sky (secure each section to prevent your telescope from falling apart). Add a painted and decorated carpet roll totem pole and reinvent your campsite into a Native American settlement!

**2** Leave the box of tubes on the floor by a table and watch how children complete simple mathematical skills through their play. They will sort by size using both the height and/or diameter of the tubes and may make a set of nesting 'cups'.

**3** We played roller races: choose a tube, add a colour mark or number and you're ready. Just roll your tube and see which goes the furthest. Try your hand at 'cheese rolling'; lay out a 'race track' on a smooth floor and roll your tube from start to finish trying to stay on track to the end! Back-breaking but fun!

**4** Comparing different circumferences can be made fun too. Lay out some unwanted wallpaper on the floor, choose a few different tubes and draw a ½ cm-wide line in permanent pen across the width, then paint the rest of the tubes, using different colours. Before the paint dries, roll them along the paper and then compare the lengths of paint with each tube. Place the longest tube on the base and stack the rest in size order to make a circular pyramid.

**5** Make tubes into finger puppets with scrap fabric and paper. Stories can be made up while the puppets are being developed or create familiar characters from fairy tales or favourite stories and use them to enhance your story telling. Our favourite 'set' was the characters from *Winifred's New Bed* by Lynn and Richard Howell, and they added to the tale immensely, taking turns to add Scruffy



Dog or Jerome Giraffe to the bed (which was a rectangle of fabric on a piece of board) until Winifred fell out.

**6** Using the inners of a sticky tape reel, we made snails for our very own snail race game. On two pieces of card were drawn simple snail outlines, coloured in and stuck to the rims of the reel. Ready to play! Most popular and simplest, though, is skittles; made from painted or tissue paper-covered tubes and toppled with a soft foam ball for indoor fun!



**about the author**

Wendy Bowkett has worked in early years settings for over 30 years, and ran her own private day nursery for 15 years. As well as contributing to *Teach Nursery*, she has written a number of books for those working with 0-5-year-olds.