



Susan Brackney
Recycle It

» An all-around bottle cap appreciator, Susan Brackney is an avid crafter, beekeeper, and the author of *The Lost Soul Companion: Comfort and Constructive Advice for Black Sheep, Square Pegs, Struggling Artists, and Other Free Spirits*.

Bottle Cap Madness

Make magnets, jewelry, and more with these underappreciated nuggets.



Somewhere in the world, there are drunken revelers crooning about 100 bottles of beer on the wall. Meanwhile, I fret about the scores of precious bottle caps that will go to waste. The Red Stripes. The Heinekens. The occasional Labatt. They're all so varied and colorful — not to mention sturdy enough to be the stuff of real crafting.

Relatively unadulterated, individual bottle caps become miniature, scallop-edged frames. And a bottle cap's exterior has its own allure. Caps with interesting typography, the odd anchor or crown, or, say, highly stylized birds, dragons, or other creatures are particularly beguiling.

Best of all, bottle caps are often free for the taking, they're easy to collect and store, and you don't need fancy tools to work with them. A hammer, a nail punch, and some wire, perhaps, or strong glue, resin, and a magnet or two are all you need to get started.

AMASSING YOUR STASH

You shouldn't have to drink yourself into a stupor to get loads of good bottle caps. If you ask nicely, restaurants and bars are usually happy to part with them. Just be sure to rinse them well and allow them to dry completely.

If it's vintage bottle caps you're after, things get a little trickier. Valuable both to collectors and to crafters, vintage caps can be costly and scarce. Laura and Benjamin Beamer, of Oakridge, Ore., have created high-end jewelry with vintage caps since 2000. The couple has collected nearly 4,000 unique bottle caps and well over 100,000 in all, which they've meticulously sorted by kind and condition and placed in hardware store-type drawers.

Set aside your favorite bottle cap designs, and sort the rest by color, so you'll be ready when inspiration hits.

BOTTLE CAP MAGNET: USING BOTTLE CAPS "AS IS"

1. Copy or draw an image onto heavy paper or cardstock, then carefully cut out a small circle with the image in its center.
2. Glue the image into the inside of your bottle cap.
3. After the glue has dried, paint on clear nail polish or mix a small amount of clear resin and pour it onto the image seated inside the bottle cap. Kerry Casey of Cornwall, N.Y., sells her wares on Etsy and says that when it comes to pouring resin, less is more. "I've found that if you're looking for a crisp, clean image, less resin is better."
4. You may notice some bubbles forming as you pour the resin into your cap. To de-gas a resin product such as Envirotex Lite, lightly blow on its surface, or save your breath and use a hair dryer. "When I'm doing a whole bunch of [magnets] at a time, I get the bubbles out with a blowtorch," Casey says.
5. Once the interior of your bottle cap has dried and cured, you can glue a small magnet to its exterior, allow it to dry completely, and voilà!

PENDANTS AND PURSES: THE HOLE STORY

1. To make a simple pendant, use a 1/16" metal punch to make a small hole along the top edge of your bottle cap.
2. Follow the Bottle Cap Magnet steps 1–4, taking care not to cover the hole you just made with resin.

Photography by Beamer Arts Design (above and B); Kerry Casey (A); Susan Brackney (C); Beck Underwood (D)



Fig. A: Bottle cap magnets. Fig. B: This charm bracelet was worked with a jeweler's precision. Fig. C: Bottle caps

make up the chains around this mirror frame. Fig. D: Another bottle cap chain comes to life.

3. Once the cap has dried and cured, insert a split ring into the hole, clamp shut with needlenose pliers, then run your desired length of ball chain through the split ring.

4. Willing to bore a few more holes per cap? Janet Cooper, of Sheffield, Mass., flattens vintage bottle caps in a large press and then joins them to one another in 4 spots to create a chain mail effect for her bottle cap purses.

ROPES AND SNAKES

For more than a decade, Beck Underwood of New York City has linked ordinary bottle caps to create sundry snakes and skeletons. Underwood punches a hole through the center of each cap with a large nail and hammer, 20 or 30 at a time.

1. To make a folk art-style snake that's 2' long, drill or punch a hole through the center of 120 bottle caps.

2. String the caps one by one, each facing the same direction, onto heavy-gauge steel wire (aluminum might break). Secure one end using the needlenose pliers, an eye hook or other fastener, and a large bead or block (the snake's tail).

3. Once all the caps have been strung, again use the needlenose pliers to close and attach the remaining bottle cap rope end to a piece of scrap wood. This will serve as your snake's head.

4. Embellish the wooden head and tail parts with acrylic paints, and seal with clear acrylic spray finish. If it's going outdoors, hit the bottle cap rope portion with the spray finish, too.