

## The Rowdy Pea

October 26, 2007

### but waldorf toys are so expensive (part one)

Last year I was at a Waldorf conference and many of the mothers in attendance (me included!) had the same concern: "But Waldorf toys are so expensive!" The lecturer nodded in an understanding way and then offered his response that waldorf toys are actually not expensive at all. He said if a mother wished to spend a hundred dollars or more on a single doll, well that is just fine because it will surely be a beautiful doll and will keep a craftsperson in business, and it is much preferable to a mass-manufactured doll full of synthetic materials and made by machine, but that it is much "more waldorf" (his words) to sew a simple rag doll right at home. We all heaved a collective sigh of relief at that point, except for the moms who said they don't sew. "Well, go ahead and learn then," the teacher said. "There are books written to teach eight-year-olds how to sew a doll. There's nothing wrong with using a book for children." He went on to warn us all against getting too caught up in the "accoutrements" of waldorf, and against perfectionism in general. Good stuff that I am still thinking about today, almost a year later. Here are a few other waldorf-y toys that \*can\* be very expensive, but don't have to be:

The much-lauded playsilks can be made at home easily, using scarves from Dharma Trading Company (about \$2 apiece) and Kool-Aid or food coloring. It is as easy as can be, and the benefit is two-fold: there is the fun of dyeing the silks as a family activity, and then you have the silks to play with for years.



As for those \$300 playstands being sold on-line? Well I won't knock 'em because they are wonderful toys and well worth the money, but we simply didn't have the money so we made our own for about \$40. And Josh is no handy-man by any stretch. But looking at the design you can just tell it isn't rocket science. And it wasn't!



I don't think I've ever been to a thrift store that didn't have a good supply of wicker baskets to be had for a song (la-la-la!) We use them for playing and for toy storage. Hand-crafted ones are great of course, but if you can't afford it you can't afford it. These have a similar look and are recycled, which I think is a nice lesson for Ivo. Okay for all of us!



Okay, well these are really expensive . . .



Just kidding! Ivo plays with this kind of stuff all the time. free, free, free!

Some of these blocks were purchased as a set, imported from Poland no less (why? why? why?!) And some were cut from a tree branch that fell into our yard. Guess if Ivo cares which ones cost \$40 and which ones were free?



This is not meant to demean the beautiful Waldorf toys available online and through catalogs (and at a shop nearby if you are lucky). I have a true appreciation for fine craftsmanship and the skill that goes into making wooden toys and natural fiber toys. And while many are out of my price range I certainly would not say they are "overpriced" at all. But if you can't afford it, simply don't have the money, period, there is no reason to feel bad about it. We have our creativity and a world of natural materials to be had for the taking. Children don't need much-- a lot of times the gift is in what you aren't giving them rather than what you are. ("less is more" is a common theme in designing Waldorf play spaces). Even lovingly hand-crafted toys can contribute to consumerism if you feel you or your child will somehow be more complete if you can purchase them. Here's what I try to do: window shop, find ideas, purchase things that I really feel are a good value for our family (and I don't mean cheap, I mean a good value for our family!) and with the rest, just "make do": create it ourselves, find it used, or just put it out of my mind and move in another direction. And with the winter holidays coming I think I may need to post that on my refrigerator as a reminder.

I have more thoughts on this, but for another day--this is getting really long and if you've read this to the end, then thank you!  
You're too kind :)

Posted at 10:31 AM in [crafting](#), [family life](#), [seasons of joy](#) | [Permalink](#)

## Comments



you are so magic

Posted by: [wendy](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 12:57 PM](#)



Wow, first off thank you for the beautiful doll which we just received. Em just loves it. Thanks also for all of that good information that you posted today!!! I've been flipping through the Waldorf catalogues and get a little down when I see the beautiful work but the heavy prices. Em doesn't have a huge amount of toys and I really like that because she has learned already at such a young age to entertain her self. She's 22 months and has really started to imagination play. She has a wooden kitchen which I bought her when she was 1 and even as an infant found the greatest joy in opening and closing all the cupboards and turning the knobs. This year I think we'll get her the playstands but just trying to find the best prices. Anyway, sorry to ramble on, but your post was exactly what I've been thinking about as well. Thanks for the great writing.

Posted by: [greenemother](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 01:47 PM](#)



Absolutely! I pretty much have a standard that I don't buy anything that I can (sort of) replicate at home. I take a good look at an item and wonder..."hmmmm, how hard would it be to create a similar item?" This keeps me from not spending AND it keeps me busy crafting. This being said I am in favor of buying from local crafters too!

Posted by: [Amber](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 05:24 PM](#)



You read my mind. I've so been drooling over my Nova Naturals catalog which just arrived yesterday, but no way can we afford all the beautiful things in there. And honestly, the kids don't need it. I love that you're on the same page too.

Posted by: [Mary Beth](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 06:46 PM](#)



Words escape me at the moment.....but I am SO PROUD THAT YOU ARE MY LITTLE GIRL! You have the most important part all figured out.....and I am still working on it.

I felt guilty for years that I couldn't afford "the best"--turns out those old dolls out of corn stalks and the doll house furniture out of old thread spools and cast-off packaging and whatever might have been very avante garde!! Where was "Waldorf" when I needed it?

I love you!

Love, Hugs, and How Can I Make This At Home Kisses for Ivo~

Mom

Posted by: [Mom](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 07:47 PM](#)



thanks for the tip on silk scarves!

I adore the handmade toys coming out of the waldorf tradition and love to support artists when I can, but also mine those catalogs and stores for ideas.

I've also found a similar thing in the Montessori world--Sophia Cavaletti, a student of Maria Montessori and leader of a branch of montessori education, urges teachers and parents to make the materials themselves, maintaining that the care adults put into the materials we give our children is vitally important to the children.

I go from admiring the artistry to just wanting more and more stuff, and then it's just like commercial consumerism. (well, except it would support real artists and be more beautiful, but that same I-want-I-want thirsting in the consumer)

there is something really lovely in imperfect things; homely toys, even. I made a little cradle doll for my son that was just a receiving blanket, tied at the neck, with rags stuffed inside for the head, and was so tickled that it was his favorite toy for a season.

Posted by: [libby jane](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 11:03 PM](#)



Interesting post. One thing that I have noted on Waldorf forums is the almost obsessive nature of the parents (usually mom) who are trying to provide a Waldorf home and educational experience for their children. And this includes having a well-stocked playroom for their kiddos. I guess I don't see the point in buying 10+ playsilks when probably 3 or 4 are plenty for my DD's needs. I have drooled over the Nova Natural catalog but I just have to tell myself that for the most part we don't "need" any of those things. Ella has one Waldorf doll, a set of wood animals for her Melissa and Doug barn that she got for her first birthday and the playsilks and that is all I've ordered so far. We are also making do with what we have and what we can find outside and second-hand. It isn't even about the cost factor for me, it is all about teaching her responsible consumer habits over the next few years.

I really have come to the conclusion that like almost anything else in life, Waldorf has to be approached on a personal level and fit with what is comfortable for the family as a whole. When it is approached with zest instead of zeal, with the interests of the child always at mind and not just on the dogma of Steiner then I am in fully on board with Waldorf. Or maybe I am just not Waldorfy enough, so I am just not "getting it". :-)

I am really glad you brought up the consumer side of Waldorf because when we started learning about Waldorf this is exactly what surprised me the most about many of the philosophy's adherents. Maybe it is more an American issue than European- we seem to be generally more obsessive about collecting not just stuff, but "brand name" stuff in the US.

OK, I've rambled a ton!

Posted by: [Jess](#) | [October 26, 2007 at 11:05 PM](#)



Yes, I read this post to the end, because I relate so much! I really fight with myself not to get consumer-ish about those simple handmade things that I am drawn to for the very reason that they represent something oldworld and natural and decidedly unconsumer-ish. I have fallen in love with enki/waldorf because they inspire me to make things for my little guy, (we've done the koolaid playsilks and the fallen branch blocks too!) and, for those things that I don't think I can make myself - wooden figures and such, we have a wishlist that our relatives can access if they feel they want to purchase gifts. So far so good! And you've got me thinking about the playstand, until now it was on the I-can't-make-it-so-I-hope-the-relatives-will-pitch-in list!

Posted by: [Taimarie](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 01:18 AM](#)



I really like what the commentor Libby Jane said (and I think she hit it right on) when she said: "I go from admiring the artistry to just wanting more and more stuff, and then it is just like commercial consumerism." My children play with baskets of pinecones, shells, and tree blocks and their imaginations truly soar when there are no limits to just what those things could be, whether it be a pinecone ice cream cone or a seashell bowl. I get the natural toy catalogs and drool, and think oh they need this, and this and this.... and then I want to "collect" everything Waldorf-- which defeats the whole philosophy!

Posted by: [Nicole](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 01:23 AM](#)



hi, i'm a italian mom , searching on the web about real life experiences in waldorf style with children, i came in your blog i don't know really how..but i like it, it's very near at the heart..i really like to read the part 2 ! i'm interesting of it. thanks for sharing your reflections, by now.  
monica

Posted by: [monica](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 09:13 AM](#)



Great, great post!! Thank you so much for sharing your ideas. Truly wonderful. It is hard to have the hand crafted, nice quality toys when money is tight. I never thought about cutting up a branch to make blocks! What a great idea! We have plenty of branches around here... And the playsilks...THANK YOU for that link! I was planning on getting some for this Solstice for my daughter, but could only afford about two of them! Great idea. Thank you again.

Posted by: [Bluebirdbaby](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 09:26 AM](#)



I LOVE this post! I will have to link to it soon, because it is true that the "nice" toys are quite expensive.

I don't like feeling that I have to pay a lot to get "the right" wooden toy. It still feels like rampant consumerism to me, even though I am not purchasing the latest hot Bratz doll or something similar.

Posted by: [Mom Unplugged](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 11:02 AM](#)



I love the look and feel of the more natural

"Waldorfy" toys, but we have many hand me downs and gifts that P enjoys playing with too. I try to balance it all.

Posted by: [KATE in NJ](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 12:09 PM](#)



Amanda, you just totally inspired me. We've been talking about having all the relatives pool together to get A a wooden kitchen but thinking about it we could pretty easily spend a day together in the family woodworking shop (where we spent a lot of time as children) making one as a group, a few slabs of wood, some knobs and cut pieces from a log. Perfect. Sometimes we forget what we actually can do rather than buy.

Posted by: [Stacey](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 01:47 PM](#)



this is a wonderful post, amanda. i often think about these things too- you put your thoughts so well! thanks for the information on dying the silks!

Posted by: [melissa](#) | [October 27, 2007 at 03:38 PM](#)



What a well-timed post with the holidays looming, Amanda! It looks like you've really struck a chord with a lot of people, me included. When those catalogs of lovely toys start rolling in, it's so easy to get wrapped up in how beautiful they are, and how I'd like to make CJ's play/ learning room look. I think I'll post this on my fridge too! Did you find plans for the playstands somewhere? I'd love to show them to my husband and see if he's up for a challenge! And where did you find the instructions for how to dye the playsilks? That sounds like it could be a lot of fun. Thanks a bunch for such a thought-provoking post...I'll be looking forward to Part 2!

Posted by: [Jenny](#) | [October 28, 2007 at 01:49 PM](#)



I followed your link from MDC. I love your post about this, it is so true! I find myself drooling over Nova Natural as well, but in reality I've boxed up 3/4 of my child's natural wooden beautiful toys because she already has more than enough.

Cara

Posted by: [Cara](#) | [October 29, 2007 at 07:28 AM](#)



Amanda...thank you for this post. I am really loving it today as I had one of those days where I sank into a funk of not knowing just how to get in the groove with all of this natural and imaginative play that I am so trying to better incorporate into our lives. Sometimes I get really overwhelmed...and posts like this bring me to a place of recognizing small steps that I can make. I appreciate the information here. Thank you so much!

Posted by: [Jessamyn](#) | [October 29, 2007 at 11:20 PM](#)



Well put. I totally agree.

Waldorf is not about what you have. Although sometimes it sure seems like having all those things would be great it is not a must. In fact I believe that having a room crammed full of toys can be overwhelming for a child.

There are few things that are played with as much in my home as the things that help my girls imitate me and the things they have collected themselves.

Posted by: [Marianne](#) | [October 30, 2007 at 09:58 PM](#)



I don't have room for a sewing machine, have a learning disability, and my son is afraid of dolls, so I doubt I will be making him a doll anytime soon. But I agree that toys are in general not that important to buy for kids. they can play with pretty much anything.

Posted by: [Jenjen](#) | [October 30, 2007 at 10:13 PM](#)



love this post. so so so good.

did you follow any sort of pattern for the playstands, or just make it up with dimensions garnered from somewhere?

Posted by: [cloth.paper.string](#) | [November 01, 2007 at 02:04 PM](#)



Great post! I can't believe I've never been to your blog before tonight! I linked over from Mary Beth at salt and chocolate. I'll be back later to look around more! Fabulous!

Posted by: [Grace](#) | [November 01, 2007 at 08:04 PM](#)



I would also love to know where you found the plans to build the stands. Wonderful post--thank you for these thoughts. So timely as the holiday catalogs start pouring in...

Posted by: [Ali](#) | [November 02, 2007 at 09:42 AM](#)



I'm with ya sister. I'm now officially in search of a tree to saw up into blocks!

Posted by: [Stefani](#) | [November 04, 2007 at 07:33 PM](#)



OK I am officially a poor person yet I do own some "expensive waldorf toys" and have made a decision to eradicate all plastic from our house. My reasoning goes like this: over the last nearly-six years we, as a family on whole, have spent a small fortune on plastic toys. Some was cheap and some was quite expensive. It was bought bit by bit and largely we didn't see any gaping hole in our pockets. But added up altogether it's a lot. Most of it lies broken. A \*large\* chunk of it I had to give away as I didn't have the room anymore. It would have been

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wiser had I have thought it through to have bought a choice number of wooden toys which will last and last rather than the gross weight of plastic which has been discarded. The price would have been comparable. A little but good quality is better than a lot but disrespected. My folks will buy my kids presents whether I like it or not so now I just give a list of what I want them to spend their money on. We're both happy.

The free stuff is of course the best stuff - animals made out of wool - finger knitted snakes - pine cones a big hit here too. It doesn't have to be expensive but it sure should be beautiful.

Posted by: [Qalballah](#) | [November 06, 2007 at 02:34 PM](#)

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