Puzzle Funnel

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In his retirement, DH enjoys doing jigsaw puzzles . . . along with some of his trusty sidekicks.

He has amassed a large collection of puzzles, and he stores them on shelves, filed on edge like books for easy retrieval. The pieces are kept in ziploc bags inside the boxes.

The bags keep the pieces secure, but getting the pieces back inside the bag can be a bit of a pain. If only there was a way to sweep the pieces neatly into the bags without the risk of losing a bunch of them onto the floor . . . . !

A funnel would be perfect, but where on earth would I get one with a spout large enough to let puzzle pieces through? My canning funnel -- the biggest one I could find -- isn't nearly large enough. I did see a largish special-purpose hopper/funnel on line that might have worked, but it was priced at well over $100 – too much for our puzzle budget. Surely I could come up with something workable for a lot less . . . .

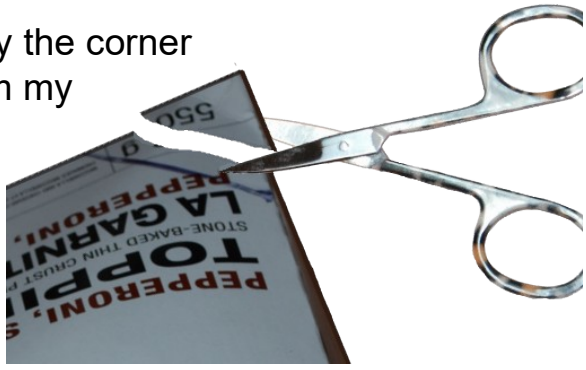
At the time, I hadn't yet started making pizzas from scratch, and DH was still buying frozen pizzas from the grocery store. The flat boxes, about 14" square and about 1 1/2" deep, were just what I needed.

I started by cutting the box on a curve, trimming away the open top of the box and leaving the two sealed sides intact. This will become the hopper part of the funnel.

To make the spout, I needed a cardboard tube about 3-4" in diameter to allow the puzzle pieces to pass through easily. A large tube from wrapping paper or an empty juice can with both ends removed is perfect.

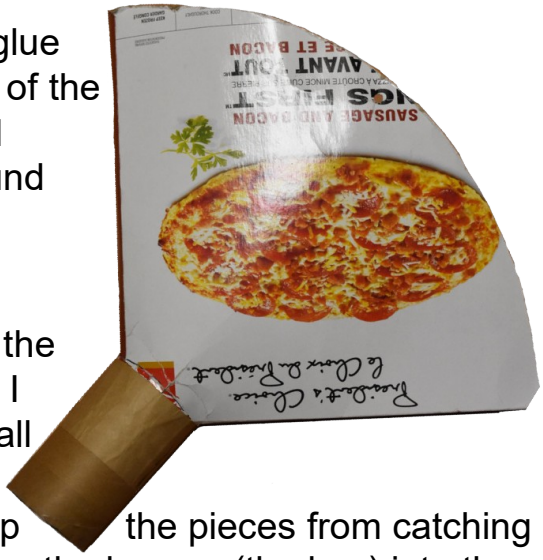
Next I had to cut a hole in the remaining corner of the pizza box. To determine how large to make it, I held the tube against the uncut corner of the box and used a marker to draw a guideline for cutting (in the photo I'm showing a short tube for clarity) .

Next, I trimmed away the corner about 1/2" away from my marked guideline.



Using scissors, I slashed up to the marked line at intervals of about 3/8" or so, creating a gluing surface for attaching the tube to the box to form the spout of the funnel.

I used Magna-Tac to glue the flanges to the end of the tube (left). Once that dried, I wrapped brown paper tape around the flange on the outside of the tube, for extra hold (right).



Finally, to make a smooth edge on the inside where the tube and box join, I applied strips of brown paper tape all around. This strengthens the join and helps to keep the pieces from catching as they move from the hopper (the box) into the spout (the tube). Done!

To use the funnel, insert the spout into a ziploc bag, and while gripping the bag together with the spout, fill the hopper with the puzzle pieces. Shake the funnel slightly to facilitate the flow of pieces through the tube into the ziploc.

If I wanted to make the funnels prettier, I could decoupage them with fancy paper, but they are perfectly service-able as they are.

If you're thinking of replicating my idea, avoid the boxes that have a waxy or plastic coating; plain card-board ones are better, so that the glue and paper tape will stick properly.

It's more than a decade since I made my first couple of funnels, and although they're only cardboard, they have held up pretty well. DH still gratefully reaches for one every time he puts away a puzzle, and says he wouldn't be without them.