

Cardboard Box Fort: Turn Amazon Boxes Into Architecture

Crafts | All Year | Ages all-ages

That pile of cardboard boxes in your garage? They're not trash. They're fort material.

We've built probably twenty of these over the years. Some lasted an afternoon. One lived in our basement for three months until it started to sag and smell like markers. Here's what actually works.

What You Need

- Cardboard boxes (3-6 boxes minimum — appliance boxes are gold, but Amazon Prime boxes work fine)
 - Packing tape or duct tape
 - Box cutter or scissors (adult use only)
 - Markers, crayons, or paint
 - Optional: string lights, blankets, pillows

How to Build It

Start by arranging your boxes. Don't tape anything yet. Let the kids move them around, stack them, try different configurations. This is half the fun.

Once you've got a layout, tape boxes together. Use way more tape than seems necessary. Kids will lean on these walls, crawl through doorways, and probably sit on the roof. Reinforce corners and seams.

Cut a door. Make it big enough that you can actually get in without ripping cardboard. We learned this the hard way when our four-year-old got stuck halfway through a door I'd cut too small.

Windows are easier than doors. Cut three sides of a square, leave the bottom attached, and fold it out for a working shutter. Kids love this.

Now they decorate. Let them go wild. Washable markers if you care about your floor. Paint if you're feeling brave or you're doing this outside.

What We've Learned

Build it where it can stay for a while. Moving a taped-together fort is a nightmare.

Add string lights inside if you have battery-powered ones. Makes it actually cozy enough that kids will play in there for hours.

Blankets over the top turn it into a proper cave. Clips or clothespins help.

If you're in an apartment or have limited space, one big box works. Cut out the bottom, drape a sheet over it, instant hideout.

Kansas City Tip

If you need boxes and haven't been ordering enough online, ask at Nelson-Atkins or any of the local bookstores like

Rainy Day Books in Fairway. They're usually happy to give away clean boxes. We've also had luck at the Overland Park Farmers Market on Saturdays — vendors break down boxes all day.

These forts are perfect for rainy days when you can't get to Loose Park or when it's too cold for the playground. Ours have been rocket ships, castles, dinosaur caves, and one very elaborate veterinary clinic.

The fort will eventually collapse or get gross. That's fine. Recycle it and build another one.

