

# Rags to Riches: Recycling and Upcycling Old Clothes

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Wish you could start with a fresh new wardrobe? Do you have a closet full of garments you don't wear anymore? With a little imagination and work, you can turn those rags to riches!

By checking your closets carefully, you may find there is a lot more life in garments that have been hanging unused for some time. Although you can discard or donate those garments, try giving them a new personality by recycling them. Recycling can be a real challenge, but it's fun and rewarding.

The type of recycling you decide to undertake will depend on your needs and the garment(s) you have to recycle. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the garment need minor or major repairs to become functional again?
- Is the fabric in good condition (no pulls, worn spots, or permanent crease lines)?
- Is the design of the garment suitable for recycling? Are the color, design, texture, and quality of fabric fashionable and flattering for you?
- Will the person for whom the garment is planned wear the garment?
- Is the garment worth the effort (time and money) to recycle?



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Begin the recycling process with an inventory. Take all the clothes out of your closet and bureau drawers. Divide items into five groups:

1. Those you can wear as they are.
2. Those that need only minor changes.
3. Those that need major changes.
4. Those with usable fabric.
5. Those that should be removed from your closet and donated to a thrift store.

Before tackling any recycling project, study new fashion ideas. Collect examples from your favorite fashion magazines and social media sites. Try on the outdated garments and carefully determine what changes are possible, depending on your skill level and the garment you will be working with.

### POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Consider the color, design, texture, and quality of fabric and notions in the old garment.
- When choosing new fabric or trim to add to a garment, be sure it goes with the design and contributes to a pleasing, fashionable look.
- Select a becoming color to work with. Children's clothing should be colorful. Use bright colors in trims, inserts, collars, cuffs, and other features when working with darker colors such as navy blue, brown, or gray.
- Avoid fabrics that look too old or mature for the wearer, and be sure the fabric isn't faded or worn.
- Keep the size and placement of the fabric design in mind. Be sure it is in scale with the size of the person and the fashion to be created.
- Note the additional amount of fabric needed. Consider using contrasting fabric when there isn't quite enough old fabric for your project.
- Keep proportion in mind. Be aware of the number and location of seams, the position of fabric designs, and use of contrasting fabrics. Do not divide your figure into unattractive proportions. Avoid emphasizing poor figure features.
- Check fabric for permanent creases, faded fold lines, needle marks, snags, or trims that cannot be removed.
- Ask the owner of the garment for help to decide how to change it. This is very important when teenagers or children are involved. Their clothes need to be in tune with what their friends are wearing.

### NO SEWING SKILLS REQUIRED

Minor changes can make a dramatic difference in the fashion look of a garment without requiring a lot of work. Through recombining and reusing in creative ways and accessorizing, garments can take on a whole new look.

Recombining garments can be a fresh way to look at a garment that may have been sitting in the back of your closet for a while. A garment that is in good condition, not worn, and without any permanent stains or damage is a prime candidate. The idea of recombining is to mix and match a particular garment with other clothing and accessories you already have. Separate coordinates and "outfits" for a different look or effect.

To reuse a garment is to "think outside the box." Use your creativity to think of other ways to use the garment. For insistence:

- Use a scarf as a belt.
- Dye men's T-shirts or undershirts to wear alone or with over-shirts.

Lastly, accessorize! Accessories can be a quick, easy, and inexpensive way to update an outfit. Shoes, hosiery, scarves, belts, and jewelry are great items to collect for just the right spark.

### USING YOUR SEWING SKILLS

Sewing skills can be a major asset when choosing to restyle a garment. Remaking a garment will require careful planning, so consult popular fashion magazines and catalogs for ideas for updating your garments. Depending on the type of restyle you would like to do, advanced sewing skills may be needed.

Simple sewing procedures can often make important differences. You can change the look of a garment or hide a problem by adding:

- Suede or suede cloth patches to elbows of jackets and sweaters.
- Hand decorations. Blanket stitch the yoke seams, edges of collars, around pockets, and on belts. Crochet pretty edges on collars and cuffs. Embroider or appliqué a design over worn places.
- Machine or hand topstitch in either contrasting or matching thread. Stitch following edges and seamlines, or create your own lines to give a desired effect.
- Patches, appliqué, or embroidery to cover worn areas or give a new look. Try fusible webs for adding patches. Stitch around patches to secure them. Use patches of colorful and interesting shapes.
- Braids to finish an edge or as a trim. Make a belt out of braid by stitching it on belting and adding a buckle.
- Trims to outline design features on garments. Consider trimming features such as yokes, pockets, necklines, cuffs, collars, waistbands, or edges.

You can also change a garment by:

- Changing the hem length to suit new fashion trends and individual body proportions. If the original hemline is faded, soiled, or permanently

creased, cover it with decorative stitching, braid, or rickrack.

- Converting a plain shirt into a tailored shirt by stitching mock tucks down the front. Use mock tucks on camisoles as well.
- Making a decorative belt by using two pieces of fabric and interfacing. Stitch mock tucks lengthwise and add a buckle.

## RECYCLING GUIDELINES

There are some general principles that will help make the project a success.

- Try to keep the basic construction of the new garment as much like the original garment as possible. This will save time and effort. Major details such as bodice shape or neckline treatment should fit well and be flattering.
- Select a design that is easy to make. Changing basic features may be too difficult or time-consuming to be worthwhile.
- The pattern used should fit the fabric available. It should also follow the basic size and shape of the original garment. Patterns with a lot of pieces often are more advantageous than those with few pieces. Small pattern pieces are easier to place on fabric sections of a used garment than larger pieces.
- When adding fabric to a garment, choose something compatible in weight, texture, and care requirements. If you're adding contrasting colors or textures, see how they will look on the garment up close and from a distance.
- When adding topstitching, trims, or fabrics to one area of a garment, you may want to add some at other locations to create a unified look. The changes you make should look as though they were always part of the garment.
- If you have chosen to change the purpose of the item, think about how else the item can be used. Would the garment or textile be better suited as a pillow cover, table cover, dress-up clothes for children, etc.?

## PREPARING FABRIC FOR CUTTING

If you plan to reuse fabric from existing garments, rip all seams apart except those that can be used as they are. You can quickly remove seams by clipping threads at intervals and then pulling out the thread to remove it from the seam.

- Clean the fabric. Brush lint from all hems and folds.
- Launder if the fabric is washable. Use a spotting agent to remove stubborn oily and greasy stains. If necessary, hand wash the fabric to prevent fraying edges.

- Dry clean if the fabric is not washable. Ask the dry cleaner to pay special attention to stubborn stains and to press hem creases and seamlines flat.
- Press the fabric with a steam iron or a dry iron and damp press cloth. Press with the grainline on the wrong side of the fabric. Press all reusable linings, interfacing, and trims.
- Save all buttons, snaps, zippers, and other notions that are reusable.
- If possible, use original buttonholes, zippers, pockets, collars, and other major construction features.
- If the wrong side of fabric has a fresh new appearance, it can be used as the right side of the new garment.

## CUTTING THE NEW GARMENT

- Press pattern pieces smooth.
- Locate grainline of each fabric section to be used. Mark with chalk or temporary marking pen.
- Lay the pattern pieces on the prepared sections of fabric. Follow the grainline carefully. Pay special attention to plaids, strips, and fabrics with a nap.
- If fabric is limited, skimp on seam allowances when necessary. Mark the stitching line so you still know where to stitch.
- If piecing is necessary, do so where it will not show. Piece under arms, on collars or lapels, and inside pleats and facing. When piecing cannot be hidden, plan it as part of the decorative design such as a yoke or tucks.

## OTHER ALTERNATIVES

There are always other alternatives to “recycling” a garment. If you don't have the time or the skills, consider selling the garment through a used clothing shop or donating it to a charity. Garments or other textiles that are no longer wearable can be used in a variety of ways, such as:

- Make dust cloths from it.
- Give it to children for playing dress-up.
- Use it in rag rugs.
- Use it to tie up plants in the garden.
- Use it as stuffing for toys or pillows.
- Use it in craft projects such as quilts.
- Donate it for textile recycling at your local recycling center.

A garment worth making over is worth doing a good job to construct. Use the same sewing techniques that you would use when making a new garment. Select durable thread, interfacing, notions, and other materials if they are to be used.

Recycling garments will take time and energy, so whenever you get ready to restyle or remake a garment, try to make an educated guess as to how much work is involved. Make sure the project is one that warrants the time and trouble. And remember, the ideas and suggestions offered here are basic guidelines.

## RECYCLING IDEAS

From these	Make these
<b>Man's shirt</b>	Boy's shirt Child's dress (size 1–4) Girl's blouse or apron Child's slip Play clothes, rompers, or sun suits
<b>Man's suit</b>	Little girl's/boy's suit Tailored dress Jumper Jacket Child's coat
<b>Worn overalls</b>	Child's overalls
<b>Man's pants</b>	Pants Skirt Overalls
<b>Woman's suit</b>	Dress Jumper Skirt Child's suit, coat, or dress
<b>Woman's skirt</b>	Little girl's coat or dress, or girl's skirt (size 1–4) Little boy's slacks or overalls Add gores, gussets, or box pleats for a flair Lengthen by adding a yoke at the waistline
<b>Woman's dress</b>	Jumper (if design is not too large) Blouse, tunic, or top Child's dress or skirt Add length by adding yokes, midribs, or horizontal inserts
<b>Coats/jackets</b>	Restyled coats Short coats Jackets for children Remove the collar from a jacket and add trim Widen narrow lapels by adding braid, leather, or contrasting fabric
<b>Bathrobes</b>	Child's bathrobe Beach coat
<b>Woman's slip</b>	Half slip Slip for little girl
<b>Jumper</b>	Vest

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