

Rags To Riches

Guide C-313

Susan Wright, Extension Clothing Specialist

Cooperative Extension Service
College of Agriculture and
Home Economics



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Clothing prices got you down? Have a closet full of garments you do not 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 lots more life in garments that have been hanging unused for sometime. Rather than discarding or donating those garments, give them a new personality by recycling them. Recycling can be a real challenge, but it's fun and rewarding. And it will save you money while adding useful clothing to your wardrobe. There are two types of recycling:

1. Changing parts of a garment.
2. Changing a garment completely.

The type of recycling you decide to undertake will depend on your needs and the garment(s) you have to recycle. Consider the following points before beginning either type of recycling:

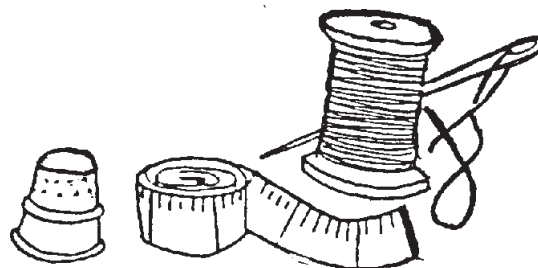
- the garment cannot be used as is or with minor repairs.
- the fabric is in good condition - no pulls, worn spots or permanent crease lines.
- the color, design and texture of fabric are fashionable and flattering for you.
- you have enough sewing experience to do a good job.

Inventory Time

Begin the 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 discarded



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 Try on the outdated garments and carefully determine what changes are possible, depending on your skill and the garment with which you will be working.

Advantages of Recycling

Not only can you save money, you get a great deal of satisfaction from remodeling garments. You can make good use of usable fabric in hand-me-downs, out-of-style fashions and outgrown garments. With a little imagination, you can change old garments so much that no one will recognize them.

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 with which to work. 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, 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 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, or trims that cannot be removed.
- Consider the final product. Will it be worth the time and effort? Do you have the skills required?
- 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 the ones their friends are wearing.

Questions to Ask

If something hasn't been worn for some time, there may be a good reason. Check the garment carefully. If you can't answer the following questions positively, it may be best to get rid of it.

- Do you like the garment? ___yes ___no
- Do you like the color? ___yes ___no
- Do you like the fabric? ___yes ___no
- Is the fabric in good condition? ___yes ___no

You also need to consider the following:

- Do you have the time to spend remodeling or repairing the garment? ___yes ___no
- Do you have the skill required to remodel or repair the garment? ___yes ___no

- Do you have the tools and equipment needed? ___yes ___no
- Is the cost of necessary notions, additional fabric, trim, pattern, and other supplies needed reasonable? ___yes ___no
- Will you enjoy the challenge of remodeling enough to make the effort worthwhile? ___yes ___no
- Will the new garment be a useful addition to your wardrobe? ___yes ___no



The Value of Recycling

Before undertaking a major remodeling project, use this exercise to determine if the potential savings will be worthwhile. Remember, economics may not be the only reason to remodel a garment. Personal satisfaction may be an important factor.

Description of Garment: _____

1. Value of old garment (what you could get for it at a garage sale or consignment shop.) \$ _____
 2. Cost of additional materials required (buttons, trim, zipper, etc.) \$ _____
 3. Value of time for remarking
(_____ hours at \$ _____ per hour). \$ _____
- A. Total investment to remake garment
(add items 1, 2, 3) \$ _____

4. Approximate cost to buy or make a similar garment. \$ _____

5. *Value of time for shopping or sewing time
(____ hours at \$_____ per hour.) \$ _____

B. Total investment to replace this garment (add items 4&5) \$ _____

Subtract A from B to determine how much money you may save.

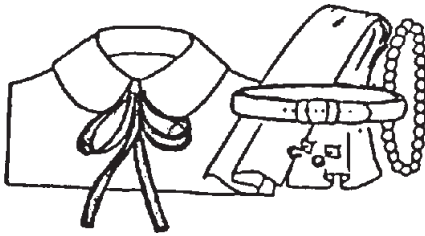
Investment to replace (B)	\$ _____
Investment to remake (A)	- _____
Savings	\$ _____

*Time is important and valuable. Items 3 and 5 let you include the value of time invested in your estimate.

Minor Changes

Minor changes can make a dramatic difference in the fashion look of a garment without requiring a lot of work. These ideas require no sewing at all:

- Select new buttons or a belt.
- Combine it with another piece of clothing to bring it up-to-date.
- Add jewelry or use a tie, bow, or scarf.



Simple sewing procedures can often make important differences. You can change the look of a garment or camouflage 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 applique a design over worn places.
- Machine or hand topstitching either in contrasting or matching thread. Stitch following edges and seamlines or create your own lines to give a desired effect.
- Patches, applique, 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 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:

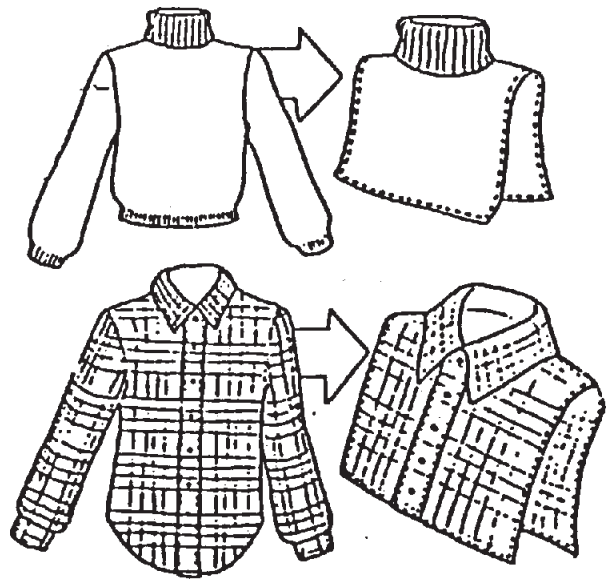
- Changing the hem length to suit new fashion trends and individual body proportions. If the original hemline is faced, soiled or permanently creased, cover it with decorative stitching, braid or rickrack.
- Converting a plain shirt into a tailored shirt by stitching mock tucks down the front. Use mock tucks on camisoles also.
- Making a decorative belt by using two pieces of fabric and interfacing. Stitch mock tucks lengthwise and add a buckle.

Major Changes

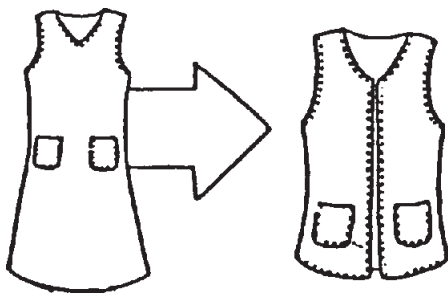
If your sewing skills are good, useable garment can be restyled to get added wear. Remaking a garment will require careful planning. Consult popular fashion magazines and catalogs for ideas for up-dating your garments. Consider the following suggestions:



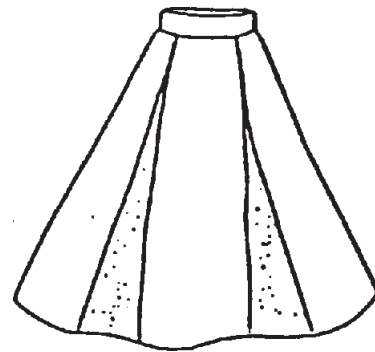
Convert a dress to a tunic or top.



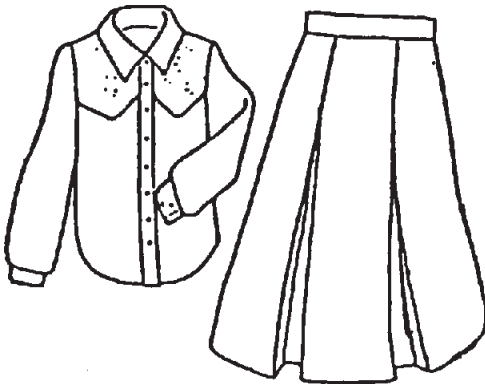
Make a sweater, skirt or blouse into a dickey.



Make a vest from a jumper or tunic from a dress. When converting garments with pockets or buttons into tunics or vests, leave enough length below the pocket or buttons to avoid a chopped-off look.



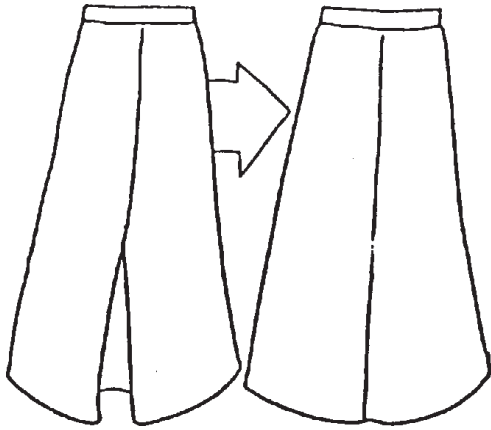
Add width by inserting gussets of coordinated fabric.



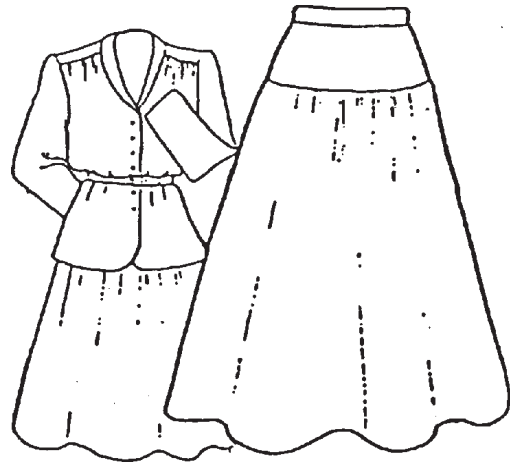
Add flare to a straight skirt by opening seams and inserting gores, godets or inverted box pleats. If the original fabric is not available, use a contrasting plaid or check. Make a yoke, blouse or bow of contrasting fabric to tie it together.



Shorten a jacket and add trim.



Sew up or convert skirt slits to pleats.



Lengthen a skirt by adding a yoke at the waistline; it can be covered with an over-blouse.



Widen narrow lapels by adding braid, leather or contrasting fabric.



Remove the collar on a jacket and add trim.



Add length to garments by inserting yokes, midribs or horizontal inserts.

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 garments 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 your 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.



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. Speed ripping by clipping threads at intervals. Then, pull thread to remove from seams.

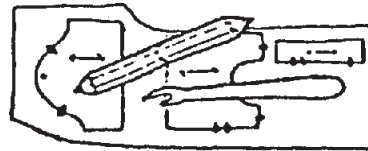
Clean the fabric. Brush lint from all hems and folds, then:

- Launder if the fabric is washable. Use a spotting agent to remove stubborn oily and greasy stains.
- Dry clean if the fabric is not washable. Ask the dry cleaner to pay special attention to stubborn stains and pressing 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 finding 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.
- 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.



If the Garment is Hopeless

If the fabric is too worn to be useful in a new garment, or is faded, torn, grayed or stained you could:

- 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.



The Major Objective

If a garment is worth making over, it is worth doing a good job constructing it. 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.

Possibilities for New Garments

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-only the beginning.

The publication was adapted from Extension Service bulletins from University of Arkansas, Colorado State University, University of Idaho, Iowa State University, Oklahoma State University, Purdue University, University of Kentucky and North Dakota State University.

Recycling Ideas

From these	Make these
Man's shirt	Boy's shirt Child's dress (1-4) Girl's blouse or apron Child's slip Play clothes, rompers or Sun suits
Man's Suit	Little girl's/boy's suit Tailored dress Jumper Jacket
Worn overalls	Child's overalls
Man's Pants	Pants for boys Skirt for girls Overalls
Woman's Suit	Dress Jumper Skirt Child's suit, coat, or dress
Woman's Skirt	Little girl's coat, dress, or skirt (1-4) Little boy's slacks or overall
Woman's Dress	Jumper (If design is not too large) Blouse Child's dress or skirt
Coats	Restyled coats Short coats Jackets for children
Bathrobes	Child's bathrobe Beach coat
Woman's Slip	Half slip Slip for little girl

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