

Climate Corner

Green looks good on you! (full article)

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With the beauty of spring, comes the dread of spring cleaning; and with spring cleaning, comes not just knee pain from scrubbing the floors, but also the fun of a closet cleanout. Not only is going through your closet a form of cleaning that is much less miserable than other forms, but it's also an opportunity to switch out your winter wardrobe for your spring wardrobe; whether that means flowy skirts, pastel colours, or the newest trends. It seems only natural for us to change our wardrobes with the seasons; but some parts of it aren't so natural- the waste, the purchase of unnecessary new products, the pressure to be up to date with current trends. So, what can be done to make our wardrobes more sustainable?

Before we can start finding solutions, we need to understand what the problem is. The fashion industry has a **much** bigger impact than you would initially expect. According to Business Insider, 'Fashion production makes up 10% of humanity's carbon emissions'. **10%!** And that's *just* the production! The impact of the fashion industry has many other components. On top of the production emissions, most clothing produced nowadays is made of synthetic fibers. Synthetic fibers are man-made through chemical synthesis, and examples include polyester, rayon, and nylon, in comparison to natural fibers, such as cotton or silk. Because synthetic fibers are, well, *synthetic*, they seep microplastics when they're washed, contaminating our water supply. On top of the production emissions *and* microplastics, resources are also needed to market, sell, and ship these products. The largest part of these resources would likely be the emissions used to ship the clothing across the world, from their production sites, usually in Asian countries, to their stores, usually in Canada and the USA. On top of the production emissions *and* microplastics *and* shipping emissions, the vast majority of the clothing produced ends up in landfills; as of 2019, that's **85% each year!** These piles of clothing then release methane, a greenhouse gas, as they break down. They also continue to seep microplastics into our water. If they're not sent to a landfill, they're often incinerated, a process that *also* releases greenhouse gases. Phew! When we look at the big picture, it's safe to say the fashion industry is a **huge problem**. When we continue to fund and support this industry, we not only become part of the problem, but we also become responsible to do something about it.

1. Know when to buy, and when to not

One way to minimize our support for this harmful industry is to **buy less**. Specifically, **stop buying clothes you don't need**. I know, that may seem like a pretty daunting, if not vague, task, so let's break it down. First, understand your personal style. Why spend your hard-earned money on clothing that's 'trendy', but not something you *actually like*? While I'm no professional in helping people understand what fit of pants their soul yearns for, my tip would be to look at what items in your wardrobe you gravitate towards, as well as what items have stood the test of time and remained staples. You can also make understanding your personal style a fun activity

by finding and compiling inspiration; you could make a Pinterest board, or look through magazines and make a collage. Then, when you find yourself considering buying an article of clothing, ask yourself, '**How long do I see myself wearing this?**'. If the answer is anything along the lines of, 'for however long it's trendy,' well... maybe it's best to pass on this one.

Second, now that you're only looking at clothing that *is* your personal style, ask yourself if this item is **filling a gap in your wardrobe**. An example of this; I love a good knit cardigan. Cardigans are such a versatile garment! They're the perfect blend of casual and sophisticated, so you can dress up any outfit that's a little too casual, and dress down any outfit that's a little too formal. However, as much as it pains me to admit, there really is no reason for me to have 10 knit cardigans. Any outfit I could make one with, could easily be made with another. There's no cardigan shaped gap in my wardrobe.

2. Buy less, then buy best

This one's simple - **let's stop giving our money to unethical companies**. If you believe that child labour and inhumane working conditions are wrong, or that wasting our planet's valuable resources is setting us up for disaster, then why would you give your money to the companies doing these things? You may say, '*I'm just one person. How much of a difference will my \$10 make?*', but when 100 people say that, that's \$1000 given to companies and used to overproduce low quality clothing that will ooze microplastics and eventually pile up in landfills. That's also 100 people telling these companies that there is a demand for their clothing, giving them the incentive to continue to supply said clothing. If that's not enough, like I said, this mass produced clothing is low quality. You get what you pay for, and there's a reason you're only paying \$10 at Amazon and H&M.

So when you're buying clothes, before you go to the chains and too-good-to-be-true online retailers, try shopping local businesses, small businesses, second hand, or from a company that is transparent and dedicated to their ethical practices. A good way to find which brands to avoid, and which ones to support is through the app Good On You. No, this article is not sponsored, but that won't stop me from recommending this awesome app. They have a rating system that makes it easy to understand a brand's practices, and find brands that align with your values. As for shopping second hand, ThredUp is a personal favourite. ThredUp is a website that sells second hand clothing for amazing prices. Other online thrift stores include Poshmark and Facebook Marketplace. If you want the in person shopping experience, I would recommend the New Hamburg MCC Thrift Store. MCC Thrift is a not-for-profit organization that supports Mennonite Central Committee relief, aid, and education projects around the world. According to the MCC Thrift website, "To date, MCC Thrift shops have contributed over \$250 million in the last 50 years to people in need." Another recommendation would be Retail Therapy KW Thrift, located in downtown Kitchener. This organization supports survivors of domestic violence.

3. How to say goodbye

So, we've built a sustainable wardrobe made up of staples that will last you for years because of their quality and connection to your personal style. Unfortunately, they won't last forever. Clothing wears down, styles change, and sizes change. So when it's time to say goodbye to clothing we once held dear, let's do it in a way that respects our planet.

While the phrase, 'out of sight, out of mind,' may be true, 'out of mind' does not mean 'out of existence'. Our old clothing still exists after we donate it or throw it away. As I stated earlier, **85% of clothing ends up in landfills per year!** So how can we keep this clothing out of landfills, and prolong its life for as long as possible? We've already made progress by opting out of trend cycles and creating a lasting wardrobe, but there's more we can do.

If the clothing is still in decent condition, donate it to somewhere where it's more likely to get used and loved. For-profit thrift stores, such as Value Village, have a history of putridly marking up prices. Also, the majority of clothing in these large thrift stores does not end up being bought, so it gets sent to a landfill anyway! So instead of donating just anywhere, you could choose a women's shelter, a homeless shelter, or even a friend or family member. Alternatively, you can list the clothing on a secondhand website, such as Facebook Marketplace, so instead of getting lost in the sea of rejected clothing, it has the chance to be individually found and picked by someone. Plus, easy money! Who doesn't love that?

If the quality of clothing is less than ideal, fear not! There are so many innovative ways to upcycle textiles. An example of this could be cutting up a shirt to use as kitchen rags. If you're handy with a sewing machine, use the scraps to mend other items, such as using a patterned shirt to patch a rip in a pair of pants. I love to upcycle clothing in this way because it gives my garments a personal touch, and makes for a fun project. If you're handy with a sewing machine *and* ambitious, you could use the scraps to make a whole new item! In my opinion, patchwork never goes out of style. This type of project is great for items such as quilts, pillowcases, tablecloths, curtains, or bags (to name a few). If none of these ideas sound appealing, give your old fibres to your crafty friend and make their day.

I know, that's a lot, but I'm not done quite yet; let's talk about clothing swaps! A clothing swap is an event where people bring clothing they no longer want, and can browse others' collections and pick out anything they'd like. Yes, it's all free! Not only is this a sustainable way to switch out your wardrobe, it's also a place to mingle and meet your community! If that sounds appealing, I'm happy to tell you about Nith Valley Eco Boosters upcoming event- **Youth Advocates Clothing Swap!** This event will take place on April 26th at Zion United Church, New Hamburg, and will run from 1:00 to 4:00; so you're welcome to drop in and leave as you please. There will be refreshments, snacks, and more resources on sustainable fashion! **To learn more about Youth Advocates, our Clothing Swap, or to read the full version of this article, visit nvecoboosters.com.**