

# CURATING A SUSTAINABLE CLOSET

by Anya Crittenton

**W**e've all been there—a wedding, a holiday gathering, a job interview, that themed-party costume you want to nail. You have to dress your best...but you're also on a budget. This was my exact situation in July. My cousin was getting married, and the dress code was “summer elegant.” I rifled through my closet, and nothing felt right or appropriate for the intense SoCal sun. I wasn't looking to drop a lot of money—groceries were expensive enough with increased inflation—but I wanted to look the best for my beloved older cuz's big day.

I knew it was time to search for a new outfit.

Fast-fashion companies felt like obvious non-starters. The fast-fashion industry is implicated in a host of environmental and human rights abuses, from over 43 million tons of harmful chemicals used to make our clothing to millions of dollars in wage theft from workers ([greenamerica.org/program/toxic-textiles](https://greenamerica.org/program/toxic-textiles)). But painfully aware of my limited funds, I wasn't sure I could pursue more expensive choices from more sustainable companies or from the cute local boutiques dotted around my home in Los Angeles.

To find a sustainable choice and spare my budget, I turned to a staple of the city—thrift stores—and ended up with an outfit of pitch-perfect summer elegance.

## A Growing Industry Waiting for You

Buying secondhand is becoming an increasingly popular option across generations for clothes-shopping.

According to the 2023 Resale Report from ThredUp, an online consignment and thrift store, over half of all consumers shopped secondhand apparel in 2022 and the entire country's secondhand industry is expected to grow to \$70 billion by 2027.

In 2023, younger generations are supporting the secondhand industry in a big way, alongside evolving attitudes towards things like sustainability, waste, fashion trends, and wealth gaps.

While nearly one-fifth of all consumers are “extremely concerned” about inflation, according to the Resale Report, most Millennials and Gen Z shoppers also express concerns about non-sustainable apparel brands and 63% believe they can reduce their individual footprint through actions like thrifting.

As for the stylishness of secondhand clothing, 56% of Millennials and Gen Zers would forego the latest trends for a “one-of-a-kind” look—my own finds are proof of that.

## Be Patient and Come Prepared

Thrift stores—in-person or online—can be daunting. Rows and rows of racks of clothing meet the eye, how do you know where to start? Try these steps the next time you go out:

**1. Know how to take care of your clothes.** Before adding more clothes to your closet, try your hand at learning how to mend your clothes. You don't need to have extraordinary sewing skills to be able to patch that hole in your jeans or learn how to depill your knitwear.

The Green America article “Make Do and Mend” ([greenamerica.org/mend](https://greenamerica.org/mend)) offers tips and tricks on mending clothes yourself or finding companies to mend pieces for you. This is also a good chance to patronize a small business or local tailor.

These skills are handy, too, for that thrifted piece you adore but which has a small tear in it.

**2. Know what you're shopping for.** When I went thrifting for my wedding outfit, I had the dress code to guide me and the knowledge of how intense Southern California's summers are, especially for an outdoor wedding. Perhaps it's not a wedding outfit you need, but to restock your jeans or cobble together an outfit for that holiday-themed party you got invited to.

When you have a mission, it becomes easier to wade through everything that won't work.

**3. Know your measurements.** One of the biggest roadblocks to thrifting is stamina, especially if you're also expending the energy to try everything on (if the store allows it). What can help immensely is knowing your clothing measurements—chest, waist, hips, shoulder width, inseam, etc. Then, bring along a tape measure on your outing and you won't have to worry about various brands' different measurements.

Depending on your style, ignore the outdated notions of gendered clothing. Knowing my measurements, I was able to shop both “men's” and “women's” for the wedding.



Now go forth with confidence to be the best-dressed at your next outing, or holiday gathering, all while using your savings to shop new items from sustainable, organic, and Fair Trade businesses. 🌱

*Anya Crittenton, right, in their thrifted wedding outfit, with their wife Dana, who also saved money by not buying a new outfit, wearing one of Anya's old dresses.*

