

# SUSTAINABLE FASHION



LIFESTYLE

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### WHY?

The fashion industry is the second most polluting in the world after the oil industry. Clothing production is largely unregulated which means that factories and brands are not held accountable for their environmental impact, and rarely for their human rights record.

Water consumption, and its waste are significant problems in fashion. For example, it takes 200 tonnes of freshwater to dye one tonne of fabric. Wastewater from these processes pours directly into the rivers of developing countries. According to 'Sustain your Style' much of this water is polluted with substances toxic to aquatic life and people. These rivers are the main source of drinking water for millions of people.

Water is just one of the environmental problems of clothes production. Others include textile waste, microfibres in the ocean and chemicals; 23% of all chemicals produced worldwide are used for the textile industry.

Cotton is a particular problem in both water use and toxicity. It is grown in globally dry areas and huge volumes of water are needed in its production – around 20,000 litres of water per kg of cotton. It is also the crop sprayed with the most chemicals with 16% of all global insecticides used on cotton crops.

Add to this list, the lack of human and workers rights in many textile factories and we see clothing production has ethical challenges. 'Sustain your style' describes them in detail here: <https://www.sustainyourstyle.org/en/whats-wrong-with-the-fashion-industry#anchor-environmental-impact>

Driven by a desire for cheap clothes, there has been a lack of transparency about the processes involved in garment production. High street labels can only sell garments cheaply if the real 'cost' of the garment is being paid elsewhere – either by the environment or by the people in factories who are being paid too little.



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Greenwashing is also a concerning issue. As there is no definition or certification of 'sustainable' brands can use the term, without backing that up by displaying good environmental practice:

<https://www.edie.net/news/7/Report--60--of--sustainability--claims--by--fashion--giants--are--greenwashing/>

Fast fashion, at its core, is unsustainable due to the sheer volume of production and rapidly changing trends leads to huge amounts of waste.

### HOW?

The best thing you can do to reduce the environmental impact of your wardrobe is to 'break up with' fast fashion. Essentially, stop buying new clothes!

If this seems daunting to you, here are a few ways to start:

- Shop second-hand – from a charity. The UK has thousands of charity shops. It can take more time than shopping in mainstream retailers so make it a fun outing. Some charities have online shops for a more convenient experience.
- Shop second-hand – from a seller. There is a growing number of clothes resale websites where you can see pictures and condition of pre-used items.
- Attend a clothes swap or organise one for your church. Here is a useful article on how to do that: <https://eco-age.com/resources/how-organise-clothes-swap/>
- Borrow or share clothes with friends.
- Learn to sew! A more labour-intensive option, but a very satisfying skill to have. Look to your local adult education centre for a suitable course.
- Try 'visible mending' – make a feature out of that hole in your jumper rather than hiding it: <https://visiblemending.com/>



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Orsola de Castro (a sustainable fashion pioneer) says "the most sustainable garment is the one already in your wardrobe". 'Slow Fashion' follows this ethos and runs a 'season' – asking you to commit to not buying new clothes from July to September each year. They say that buying nothing new for 3 months you detox yourself from the 'addiction' that many of us have around fashion: <https://slowfashion.global>

Or why not organise your own season at any time of year to do together at church? You can encourage each other, keep one another accountable and perhaps put on a clothes swap event during this time.

When buying new clothes, here are some useful resources and tips for consuming more consciously:

Read up on brands by one of the ethical assessors, such as 'Ethical Consumer', 'Good on You' or 'The Good Trade'. Each measures the environmental and social impact of clothing. None is a perfect indication of how good a brand is, as the issues are complex. Each allows consumers to compare brands and incentivises companies to improve their impact:

- <https://goodonyou.eco/> rates over 2,000 fashion brands on categories of people, planet, animals and transparency.
- 'The Good Trade' is a US resource for sustainability highlighting ethical brands. Here are their UK suggestions: <https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/fair-trade-clothing-available-in-uk>
- 'Ethical Consumer' magazine regularly reviews the ethics of clothing brands, the supply chain and their manufacturing processes. A subscription is required to access some information: <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/>

Seek out cotton which is organic, meaning low pesticide use, or has the 'Better Cotton Initiative': <https://bettercotton.org/>



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Buy good quality clothes, to keep for a long time, and learn how to repair them.

Rent clothes which you would only wear once. The rental service market is growing, and though it is important to note the environmental impact of shipping and returning rented garments, it is worth considering renting before buying a single use outfit.

Buy from brands who are transparent about their environmental and social impact. It is virtually impossible for a fashion brand to be perfect when it comes to sustainability as the issue is so complex, however we should be supporting companies who are aiming in the right direction and creating positive change within the industry.

### LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

Watch 'The True Cost': an eye opening documentary on the environmental impact of the fashion industry: <https://truecostmovie.com/>

Read <https://www.sustainyourstyle.org/>: a great platform aiming to help consumers make informed fashion choices.

### BOOKS

'*Let my people go surfing*' by Yvon Chouinard, Penguin Books, 2016. Written by the founder of clothing brand 'Patagonia' it explains the ethos for dealing with people, the environment and business. Read more about the campaigns they invest in as a result of that ethos: <https://www.patagonia.com/actionworks/campaigns/>