How to Recycle Clothes into New Fashions

When an old outfit has outlived its wearability, many people give the less dilapidated pieces to second hand or thrift shops and toss the rest in the garbage. According to the Council for Textile Recycling, this has become such a common practice that the average person sends 70 pounds of old clothing to the landfill yearly. This adds up to 3.8 billion pounds of clothing trashed annually across the country. Fortunately, many of these items can enjoy many more years of use in another form. Even torn-up T-shirts can become tank tops or bracelets, and an outdated sweater can become a new favorite bag.

Make Clothes into Jewelry

With the right tools and knowledge, a shirt can quickly and easily become a piece of jewelry. Fabric makes great jewelry, which even a self-proclaimed non-crafter can construct easily. For example, a shirt, skirt, or pair of pants can easily become a braided bracelet with just a pair of scissors and a spool of rat tail cord. To begin construction,, you simply cut three bracelet-length strips of cord and three similarly long strips of fabric. Then, wrap the fabric around the cord, braid it, and tie the ends. If your wardrobe coordinates easily, this makes for easily sourced matching jewelry.

A similar technique involves wrapping a beaded bracelet with a length of T-shirt fabric. To do this, you can take an old bracelet, or buy a simply styled new one, and stretch it out to its full length. Cut a piece of fabric that is slightly longer than the bracelet and cinch it with thread on either side of each bead. Play with colors by using mismatched or brightly colored thread, or choose a similarly colored thread for a uniform look. Try coordinating by making a matching beaded necklace via the same method.

Make Clothes into Other Clothes

Teenagers, bargain-hunters, and avid recyclers have long enjoyed the process of altering outdated T-shirts to create a different look. This technique is easy and requires little time, as most of the structure of the shirt already exists. For instance, you can quickly and easily remove the sleeves of a T-shirt to make a tank. Cut the sleeves as well as the hemline away, then cut the upper part of the shirt into the neckline and strap styles as desired. If you like a racerback style, simply tie two rear straps together with a length of fabric from the hem.

You can also use a patchwork method to bring new life to more worn-out articles of clothing. Begin by cutting away the usable portions of fabric, then cut them into squares and stitch them together. Patchwork pattern books and guides present inventive ideas for designs, although many people enjoy the free-form potential inherent in the patchwork method. If you are interested in trying out a more freestyle way of patching clothing pieces together, try a circle skirt pattern. These provide a basic structure so that the crafter can experiment with patches in the skirt's body.

Shrink Sweaters on Purpose

Most adults have learned, either the easy way or the hard way, that washing a sweater in hot water shrinks it to an unwearable size. For a crafter, however, this is called "felting," and it is an ideal way of making threadbare sweaters into attractive bags. You simply wash an old sweater in hot water, using a water level that allows the clothes to move freely inside the machine. If possible, place the sweater in the dryer on high after the wash cycle is done. Test the felted wool by touch to see if it is firm enough; if not, send it through the cycle again.

One the wool is felted, consult crafting books or online sources to find a pattern. Popular felted products include bags, potholders, and even dresses. The size and shape of the pieces depend on the desired finished product, so be sure to choose a project idea before cutting. A patchwork design, for example, may call for all square pieces, while a dress may require a triangle or wedge shape. After selecting a design, use a rotary cutter or strong scissors to cut the felted wool into pieces. Then, sew the pieces together to create any number of fashionable accessories.

How to Buy Craft Supplies and Patterns

If you have chosen a project that requires a pattern oor a guide, find those first. Visit any eBay site and type "pattern" into the search box for a wide range of starter ideas. For a smaller list of options, include the type of pattern, such as "skirt pattern." For accessory projects, enter the name of the project plus the word "book." For example, " fabric jewelry books" gives several options for accessories made of fabric scraps.