

# Recycling Textiles

## Why it's important to prolong the use of textiles and dispose of them correctly?



**336,000 tonnes**

unwanted clothing thrown away each year

**£30bn**

unused clothing sitting in our wardrobes

**118 items**

average items of clothing owned per person, 26 % not used in the last year

(Source: WRAP)

Producing textiles of any kind is very resource intensive. For example, it takes thousands of litres of water to produce the cotton for a pair of jeans. Also pesticides and fertilisers are often used in cotton production and it is grown in countries that have water-scarcity.

In addition, the processing and dyeing/finishing of cotton and other raw materials can use many chemicals and heat processes, all of which are resource intensive. Some fabric dyeing/finishing factories based abroad do not control the release of chemicals into the environment properly, which causes pollution of rivers and water systems.

There are also issues with the welfare of staff employed by many factories based abroad that produce the textiles, some of which often have to work in very poor and dangerous conditions for a low wage. See how the stores you purchase from measure up at Fashion Revolution's Transparency report: FASHION TRANSPARENCY INDEX 2023 : Fashion Revolution

However, by the time you get a piece of apparel

there might have been dozens of companies in several countries involved in its production, so with a supply chain is that complex, it is very hard for a company to regulate the way the land and water are being used deep in its supply chain.

Additionally the washing of textiles that are in use can also cause issues. Microfibres (microscopic plastic fibres from our clothes) are the biggest source of primary microplastic pollution in our oceans, and they're ending up in our food. The Issue — #WhatsInMyWash?

Finally, when clothing is disposed of at end of life, some of it is ending up in countries where it can't be disposed of properly and ends up being inappropriately tipped, which causes massive issues.

Textile businesses need to halve the greenhouse gas footprint of the products they sell by 2030, if the sector is to play its part in limiting global warming to 1.5°C in line with the Paris Agreement. The Waste Prevention Programme (March 2021) proposes to fast track Extended Producer Responsibility for textiles (where businesses pay the costs of recycling), and introduce requirements for product design, labelling and consumer information, e.g. for durability, recyclability and recycled content.

## What needs to be done?

The fashion and textile industry also needs to transform from a linear business model to circular one where fibres can be continually recycled. WRAP is leading on this in the UK through their Textiles 2030 agreement.

## What can you do?

- Buy less clothes/textiles and use the clothes you have more often. Try to buy staple items that are classic styles/cuts/colours and well made, so that they look good for longer. Hubbub give some good tips on how to choose durable clothing and also show how clothing is recycled on their film: How to choose better quality, sustainable fabrics | Hubbub Vlog - YouTube
- When you do buy items, try to get things that contain recycled content, or are more sustainably produced, e.g. cotton produced to the Better Cotton Initiative standard.
- Try to buy items that can be recycled easily at end of life. Items that are made of 100% natural materials such as pure cotton, wool, cashmere silk are much easier to recycle back into garments or other textiles at their end of life. This is not easy with clothes that are made from synthetic fibres such as polyester, nylon, acrylic and elastane, or fabrics that are made from mixes of fibres such as polyester/cotton.

- Wash textiles less often, at lower temperatures and where possible line dry and don't iron them unless you have to. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/may/09/how-to-save-money-on-laundry-washing-dont-tumble-dont-soften-and-wash-less-often>
- Learn to mend things to prolong their life – there are lots of online tutorials on sites such as YouTube and Pinterest.
- Consider renting, leasing or borrowing clothes, e.g. for special occasions. There are lots of companies that do this now: Dress Hire: 11 Best Fashion Rental Sites In The UK (elle.com)
- Recycle items when you no longer want them – don't throw them in the bin – see more information on this below.

## How to recycle unwanted clothing and textiles

Clothes and textiles that are in good condition can be donated to charities and sold for re-use. This is an important way to minimise the overall impact that clothing has on our environment. You can also donate them to the Boddington WI jumble sale, which happens in March and October each year.

Many high street retailers such as Primark and M&S offer clothing donation banks in-store. These are sometimes called 'bring back schemes'.

Items that aren't suitable to be passed onto someone else can be recycled and made into new items, such as padding for chairs and car seats, cleaning cloths and industrial blankets. Drop off your unwanted items at recycling points

and clothing and textile banks in supermarket and local car parks – find the nearest at [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com)

The future

Lots of work is being done by retailers and industry currently to reduce the environmental footprint of fabrics, to design out waste and to make garment production more traceable. See an example of work that has been done at an Ellen Macarthur Foundation film regarding jeans production: The Jeans Redesign ([ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org))

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