

# When Old is New Again

— REPRINTED FROM *EARTHTALK, E/THE ENVIRONMENTAL MAGAZINE*

**J**ust because that old shirt you used to love is too threadbare to wear anymore doesn't mean it has to end up in a landfill. There's a place for old clothing even if something is missing a button or torn. Ninety-nine percent of used textiles are recyclable.

Non-profits like Goodwill and the Salvation Army play a crucial role in keeping old clothes out of the waste stream. Over 90% of clothing donated to such shops is re-sold to consumers; the rest is then sent to "pound" stores. At pound stores, clothing is sold by the pound. Any clothing that doesn't sell there is then sent to a re-use location, to be converted into rags and other products.

Outdoor clothing and gear maker Patagonia, which plies a strong environmental mandate in key aspects of its operations (from sourcing of raw materials to managing waste to making grants to environmental nonprofits), in 2005 launched its innovative Common Threads Garment Recycling program. The program was originally begun so customers could return their worn out Capilene long undies for recycling, but has expanded to taking back Patagonia fleece and cotton t-shirts as well as Polartec fleece from other manufacturers.

Of course, do-it-yourselfers handy with needle-and-thread or sewing machines can turn their old clothes into new creations such as quilts, handbags and smaller items. The web site Expert Village, which claims to have the largest online collection of "how-to" videos, offers a free series called "How to Recycle Old Clothes into New Fashions." Short step-by-step videos in the series cover such topics as transforming old garments into works of art; sewing patches, buttons and beads onto old clothes; deconstructing a wedding dress; ironing graphics onto old garments, and much more. Another good use for threadbare clothes (as well as sheets and towels) is pet bedding, whether in your own home or donated to a local animal shelter.

Textiles make up a large percentage of the weight and volume of municipal solid waste. The shame of such waste is that textiles are so easy to recycle or otherwise find new uses for. The next time you find yourself considering throwing old clothes in the garbage, consider recycling them instead. Clothing pick-up boxes are located in most cities across Canada. Some organizations, such as the Canadian Diabetes Association, will even come to your door and take them away. What was old can become new once again. X  
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## All Things Green

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If All Things Green holds a special place in your heart, we are looking for a regular contributor for this new column. A one page article is approximately 500 – 800 words. Send in a sample of your writing, and let's talk!



**Recycle your clothes – and help save the environment.**

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