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## New Life for Old Clothes

Linda Manikowske

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# New Life . . . .

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Because of the price tags on new clothes, you may be "just looking" this season. Clothes are an investment today, as their cost indicates, and you need a good return for the money you spend. "Good return" in clothing means that you wear it for as long a time as possible.

There may be one place you haven't looked. In the back of your closet are clothes that you bought once, probably loved a lot, and wore often, maybe so often that you got tired of them. Changing fashion trends, changes in body size, and the durability of man-made fibers have consigned these clothes to the closet permanently—they're too good to throw out. A new look—even a minor change—can make them wearable again.

Recycling clothing allows you to use money ordinarily spent on new clothes for other things. It also gives you the satisfaction that you "made something out of nothing."

Garments from your closet, from rummage sales or thrift shops, and from family and friends who are willing to hand them down are all good sources for recycling. Some of the ways to get these garments back into use include coordinating separates in the wardrobe, accessorizing, altering, restyling, completely making over an old garment into a new one, and mending.

## What's in your closet?

Before you begin any recycling project, take a good look at what's in your closet. Any item of clothing that has not been worn in the last year may be a good prospect. Ask yourself why it has not been worn. Is it because the item:

- is out of fashion?
- is no longer suited to your lifestyle?
- doesn't fit and is uncomfortable to wear?
- has worn areas that need mending?
- is one you are just plain tired of?

Once you have answered these questions you have some direction for getting these clothing items back into use. You can now divide them into groups:

- those that need only slight changes,
- those that need major changes,
- those with good quality, usable fabric,
- those that are hopeless.

This will give you an idea of what you have ahead of you and you can begin to make decisions about what projects you want to tackle.

## Coordinate your wardrobe

Sometimes garments can be put back into use simply by coordinating them with other pieces in your wardrobe. Being aware of current fashion makes this an easier task.

Read fashion magazines and do some shopping to acquaint yourself with current styles. Newspaper articles, catalogs, and pattern books also generate ideas. Pay special attention to the following design details:

- color (names, lightness or darkness),
- patterns (florals, geometrics, plaids or stripes),
- texture (soft or stiff, smooth or rough, shiny or dull),
- garment silhouette (necklines, sleeves, flare or fullness of skirts, fit or closeness to the body),
- detail (collars, waistlines, seams, and trim),
- accessories (jewelry, hose, shoes, handbags).

The more often you see a particular design feature, the more sure you can be that it really is in fashion. If you continue to observe over a period of time, you will be more aware of fashion trends as they start to become popular.

Re-evaluate the ensembles in your wardrobe. Consider wearing the parts of a two or three piece outfit with other things. Try on each bottom and top and experiment with new combinations.

Sometimes you need to tie items together. For example, to wear a non-matching jacket and pants together, choose a print blouse that repeats both colors.

## Accessorize to stretch a wardrobe

One of the fastest and easiest recycling techniques is to use accessories. They can make a minimal wardrobe look like more. Carefully chosen jewelry, scarves, belts, handbags, and shoes can pull together separates for a coordinated total look.

### Belts

- Control waistline fullness in jackets, vests, or dresses for a more fitted look.
- Mix and match belts with garments for a variety of textures and colors.
- Make fast and easy belts from ribbons and trims.
- Non-raveling fabrics such as synthetic suede can easily be cut and finished.

# For Old Clothes

Linda Manikowske

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## Scarves

- Wrap or twist long scarves at the waist.
- Change or fill in a too low neckline by draping with a colorful scarf.
- Twist, fold, or pleat a scarf to wear at the neck as a collar.
- Stuff a small scarf in a pocket.
- Wear a narrow scarf under a collar, tied in a square knot or full half bow.

## Jewelry

- Restring outdated necklaces.
- Use pins on very soft, stretchable necklines such as cowl neck sweaters.

## Alter for a smooth fit

Simple alterations can often improve the fit and appearance of a particular garment. Clothes that fit well make you feel and look good.

It is important to recognize what can and cannot be altered without additional fabric. Altering existing garments is quite different from altering patterns when sewing.

Before you begin to alter ask yourself:

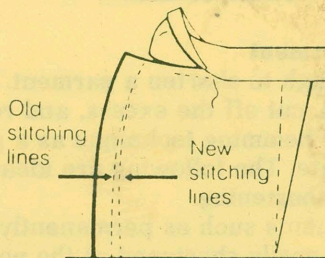
- Is there enough fabric to work with?
- Can alterations be made without changing the design lines?
- Are the fabric and garment style in good enough condition to make the work worthwhile?

## To make a garment smaller

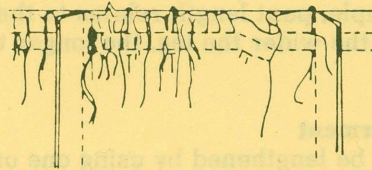
Try on the garment. Is it too loose? Does it feel baggy? Does extra fabric bunch together? If so, it is too big.

There are a number of ways to make it smaller depending on the style of the garment:

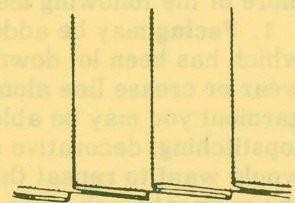
- Make larger seams. Be sure to slant new stitching to join the old, trim extra fabric and press.



- Add pleats, gathers, tucks, darts, or seams.

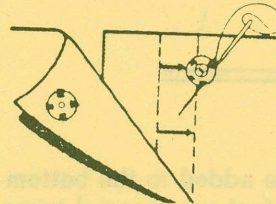


Gathers

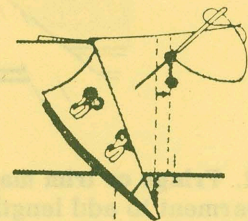


Pleats

- Make pleats and tucks deeper.
- Move buttons, snaps, or hooks and eyes farther to the inside of the garment. Make sure the closing is smooth.



Snaps

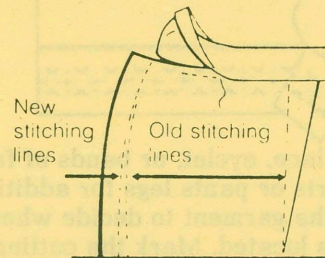


Hooks and Eyes

## To make a garment larger

Try on the garment. Does it pull, bind, or form crosswise wrinkles? Do you feel uncomfortable? If so, it is too small. In order to make it larger you can:

- Make narrower seams and darts. Seam allowances need to be at least 1/4-inch wide.



- Change darts to gathers.
- Move buttons, snaps, or hooks and eyes nearer to the outside edge of the garment. There must be enough lap for the garment to stay closed.

## Change the length

It is not practical to buy a new wardrobe each year just to keep up with hemline changes. Since today's fabrics last so long, you can use your creativity to turn yesterday's hems into today's fashions.

Begin by knowing fashionable lengths. Then find what looks best on you within the fashionable range. When possible, avoid stopping a hemline at a large curve such as a full hip or at the fullest part of the leg.

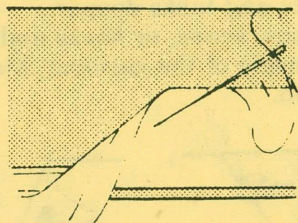
A new length may feel awkward for a while, but your body will adjust to it.

Often when lengths change, so do other design details. For example, pant length relates to the flare of the leg—the wider the leg, the longer the length.

### To lengthen a garment

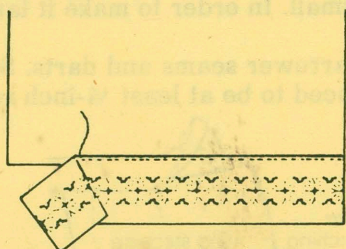
Garments may be lengthened by using one or more of the following methods:

1. **Facing** may be added to the hem of a garment which has been let down. If there is a permanent wear or crease line along the bottom of the garment you may be able to hide this with a row of topstitching, decorative stitching, or trim. You would want to repeat this trim somewhere else on the garment (such as on collar or cuffs) to tie the design together.

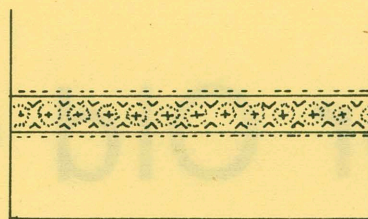


2. **Fringe or trim** may be added to the bottom of a garment to add length. Most commercial trims are finished on both edges so they can be pinned in place and top-stitched. The trim should be used somewhere else on the garment to give the design continuity. Trim can be used effectively on children's clothing to add color and brightness.

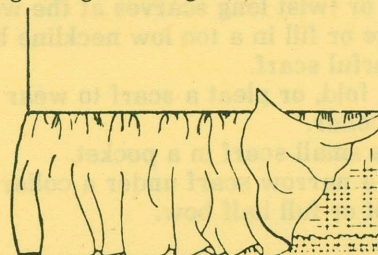
Preshrink the trim before stitching it to the garment.



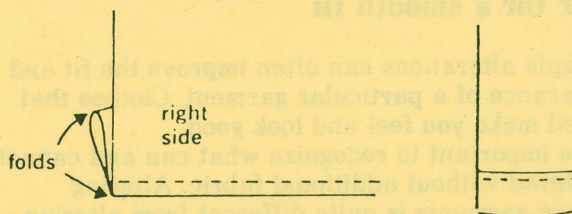
3. **Inserts** of lace, eyelet, or bands of fabric may be added to skirts or pants legs for additional length. Try on the garment to decide where the insert should be located. Mark the cutting line for the insert around the garment an equal distance from the hemline. Open a side or back seam and cut the garment apart along the marked cutting line. Join the top and bottom edges of the insert, right sides together, and machine stitch.



4. **Ruffles or flounces** may be made from a variety of lightweight fabrics. The width of the ruffle fabric should be  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times the width of the hem edge. Gather the ruffle along the top edge, pin to the garment, adjusting gathers evenly. Machine stitch along the gathering thread.

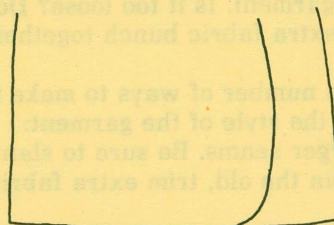


5. **Mock cuffs** can be used to lengthen uncuffed pants if the old hem is at least two inches wide. Let the hem down and face with bias hem facing or grosgrain ribbon. Fold under at the original hem, forming a double hem. Topstitch  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch from the original hemline fold, through all layers of fabric. When the fabric is unfolded, a cuff will be formed when pressed up.



6. If there is adequate hem allowance but the original hemline shows, apply trim or a decorative machine stitch over the original fold line. Several rows may make a colorful addition to the garment and look less intentional.

7. When the hem allowance on a skirt is adequate but has been trimmed at an opening, reshape the edge to a curve.



### To shorten a garment

It is easy enough to shorten a garment. Simply remark the hem, cut off the excess, and re-hem. Use the original hemming technique as a guide when appropriate. The following are ideas to consider when shortening.

1. Some garments such as permanently pleated skirts are more easily shortened at the waistline.

2. Maternity tops and jackets can be reduced in width and shortened to be worn after the baby arrives.

3. If cuffs are in fashion, shorten pants, skirts, or sleeves that are only slightly too long by making a "fake cuff." Take a ¼- to ½-inch tuck a few inches from the hemline fold. Press the tuck upward to form a cuff. Several rows of tucks pressed down can form an attractive design as well.

4. Shorten a too long unbelted dress, jacket, coat, or vest by adding a belt. If the fabric is soft enough, it can be bloused above the belt to shorten even more. Elastic or a casing also helps.

5. A sleeve that is too short can be cut off, hemmed, and rolled up. You may consider adding a self fabric or decorative tab.

6. Fabric cut from the bottom of the shortened garment can be used as trim, ties, or belts. This will help coordinate the garment with another or give it continuity.

7. Consider the placement of design features such as buttonholes and pockets when a garment is shortened. The hemline on a jacket should be 2 to 3 inches below a hipline patch pocket. Shortening a front buttoned garment means planning for the finished length to be ½ to 1 inch above the last unwanted buttonhole. Zippers can be shortened by stitching over the coils by hand or by machine at the desired length and cutting off the excess zipper.

## Restyle to revitalize

Restyling changes only part of a garment. It is sometimes a very fast and easy way to recycle. This method may be used to update garments that have lost their fashion appeal, to revitalize a garment the owner has grown tired of, or to remove or replace worn parts so that the garment can continue to be worn.

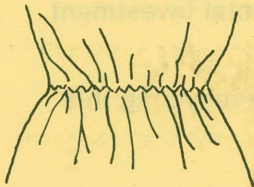
### Control fullness

1. Add short elastic inserts to waistbands at side seams or center back to reduce a waistline.

2. Dart in loose jackets, dresses, or vests or remove darts for a fuller garment.

3. Add a decorative casing and buttonhole opening for drawstring to a garment without a waistline.

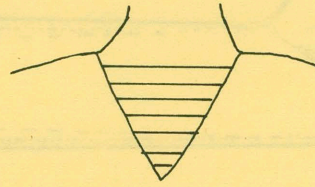
4. Make a mock casing by stitching narrow elastic at the waistline. Cover with a belt if you wish.



### Change necklines and collars

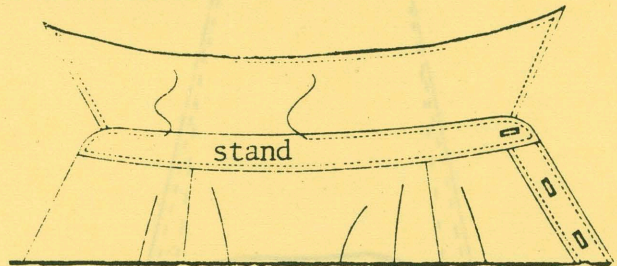
1. Collars or facings can be removed to change neckline shapes. Face or bind the edge or turn under and stitch.

2. When necklines are too low, you can fill in with contrasting fabric. Trim can also be used but should probably be repeated elsewhere on the garment.



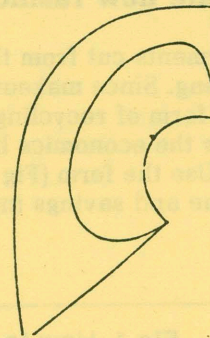
3. Remove an outdated collar and change to a tie collar in a soft complementary fabric.

4. Remove a shirt collar from the collar stand. Finish the edge of the stand and wear as a mandarin collar.



5. Remove the original collar and add a lace one.

6. Collars can actually be recut to different shapes by leaving the neckline the same and recutting just the outer edge.

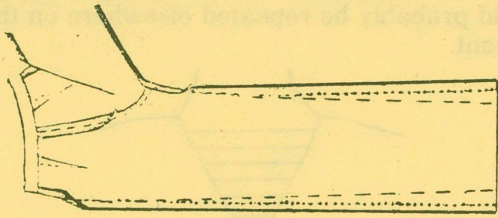


## Taper to take out width

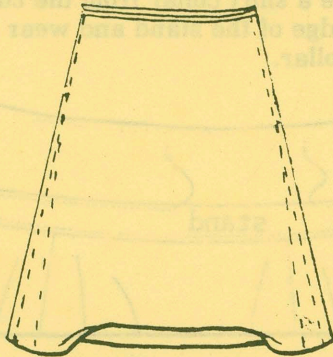
Flared pants legs, skirts, dresses, and sleeves can be straightened by seaming out the unwanted width. Be sure the lengthwise grain remains straight and at a right angle to the floor. Before making the final adjustment, experiment by pinning or basting in the change and trying on the garment. It is easier to sew the new seam if the original is there to go by. Maintain fit needed in such areas as upper arms, hips, and thighs.

**Pants.** Taper the inseam and side seam an equal amount on both legs. If only one seam is tapered

the leg will be off grain and the crease will not be in the right position.



**Skirts, dresses, or tops.** A-line skirts and dresses are usually tapered equally at each side seam. Flared skirts and dresses that have center front and back seams or princess seams are usually tapered equally at each seam.

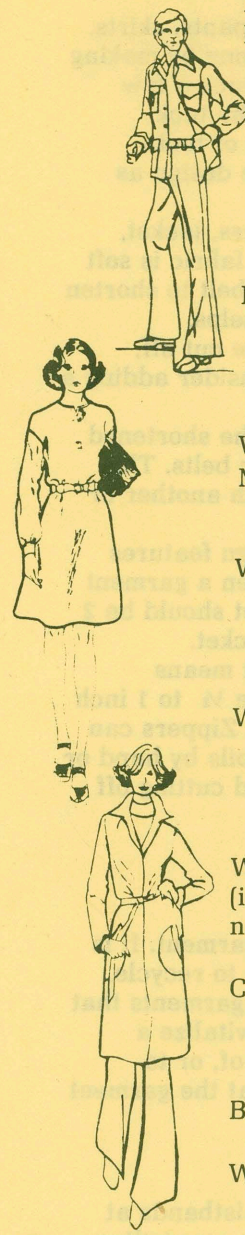


**Sleeves.** Most sleeves can be tapered at the underarm seam. Start at the armhole to get a more gradual taper but check to make sure that adequate fit is allowed in the upper arm area.

**Make over to create new fashion**

Makeovers are garments cut from the fabric of another item of clothing. Since makeovers are the most time-consuming form of recycling, you may first want to consider the economics before beginning a project. Use the form (Fig 1) as a guide in estimating the value and savings involved in recycling clothing.

Generally a smaller garment is cut from the original one but you have other options:



- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| From these:                  | Make these:                                      |
| Man's shirt . . . . .        | boy's shirt                                      |
|                              | child's dress (1-4)                              |
|                              | child's overalls                                 |
|                              | girl's blouse or apron                           |
|                              | child's slip playclothes, rompers, or sunsuit    |
| Man's suit . . . . .         | little girl's or boy's suit                      |
|                              | tailored dress                                   |
|                              | jumper jacket                                    |
| Worn overalls . . . .        | child's overalls                                 |
| Men's pants . . . . .        | pants for boys                                   |
|                              | skirts for girls                                 |
|                              | overalls   |
| Woman's suit . . . . .       | dress  |
|                              | jumper skirt                                     |
|                              | child's suit, coat, or dress                     |
| Woman's skirt . . . .        | little girl's coat, dress, jumper or skirt (1-4) |
|                              | little boy's slacks or overalls                  |
| Woman's dress . . . .        | jumper blouse                                    |
| (if design is not too large) | child's dress, or skirt                          |
| Coats . . . . .              | restyled coats                                   |
|                              | short coats                                      |
|                              | jackets for children                             |
| Bathrobes . . . . .          | child's bathrobe, beachcoat                      |
| Woman's slip . . . . .       | half slip  |
|                              | slip for little girl                             |

Fig 1. How to figure value and savings in recycling clothing

Description of garment: \_\_\_\_\_

Present value of old garment (if any) . . . . .	_____	Approximate cost of new, similar garment . . . . .	_____
Cost of materials for remaking (buttons, etc.) . . . . .	_____	Less cost of recycled garment (use dollar cost or total investment cost) . . . . .	_____
Total dollar cost of new garment (recycled) . . . . .	_____		
Labor value:		Amount saved by recycling this garment . . . . .	_____
___ hrs @ ___/hr . . . . .	_____		
Total investment in new garment . . . . .	_____		



The makeover process involves a number of steps.

### 1. Select the fabric with care.

Ask yourself, is the fabric worth my time and effort? It must be sturdy enough to withstand the expected wear of the finished garment. Look for worn areas and try to avoid these areas when cutting.

Is the fabric one you will enjoy wearing again? If you are tired of it, perhaps you should make it for someone else as you may not want to wear the makeover garment either.

Is it suitable for a child's garment? Select colors and textures children will enjoy. Avoid making children's clothing from large prints, mature designs, or fabric that is too heavy or bulky. Combine fabrics or add decorations to give the outfit a younger look.

Is there enough fabric for the planned garment? Determine this by laying the pattern on the used garment before you rip it apart. If possible, plan to reuse such design features as buttonholes and pockets. These are often a time-consuming part of the construction process.

### 2. Coordinate fabric and pattern.

Selection of the pattern is one of the hardest parts of the makeover process. Know the size and shape of the fabric pieces from the old garment and study the pattern books to find a pattern that is as nearly like the original garment as possible. Notice the placing of buttonholes, pockets, and cut darts. The new pattern must allow you to use these features as they are or cut around them.

Think of ways you can adapt the pattern you have chosen to make it fit your material without showing signs of skimping. For example, you can decrease the amount of flare in a skirt or set in a yoke to cover old buttonholes. You can add false cuffs to lengthen sleeves or pant legs.

If you don't have enough fabric you can consider combining it with another fabric of harmonizing color and texture. If you combine fabrics of nearly the same color, consider contrasting texture. If you combine different colors, use different amounts of the colors, so that one dominates. Be sure to combine fabrics that require the same care.

### 3. Prepare the fabric.

Start with a clean fabric. The fabric and style of garment determine the method of cleaning. If no label is available, you may need to determine the fiber content of the fabric first and then choose the appropriate method.

### 4. Take the garment apart.

It is not always necessary to undo every seam. Decide which ones must be ripped apart and proceed carefully. If there is plenty of fabric you may save time by cutting close to seam allowances. If you need every available inch, use a seam ripper.

Remove and save all good notion items such as buttons, zippers, and tapes. You may be able to reuse these in the makeover garment and save

even more money. Colors are often difficult to match and the used items will be your best choice.

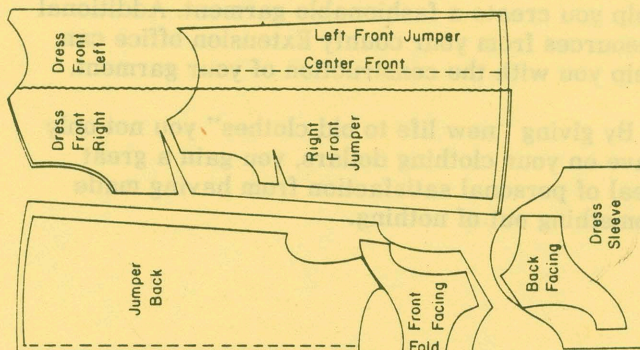
### 5. Press the pieces.

Press all pieces flat, trying to preserve the grainline. Mark any holes or weak areas at this time as you may not see these when cutting. Save time by cutting two pieces together whenever possible.

### 6. Lay out the pattern.

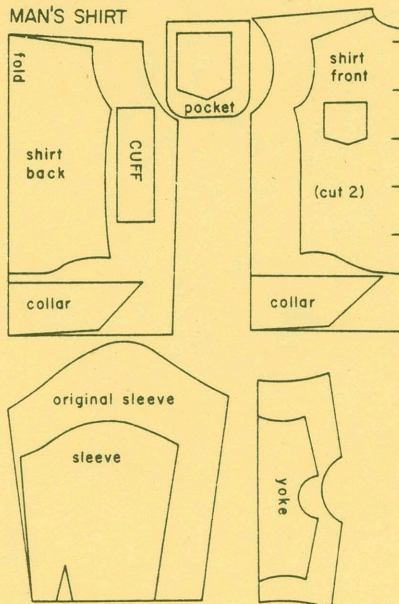
Pin the pattern to the fabric just as if it were new. Follow the grainline and cut with nap when necessary. If the fabric must be pieced, do this before cutting. Try to do it in less obvious places such as under the arms, inside pleats, or on facings.

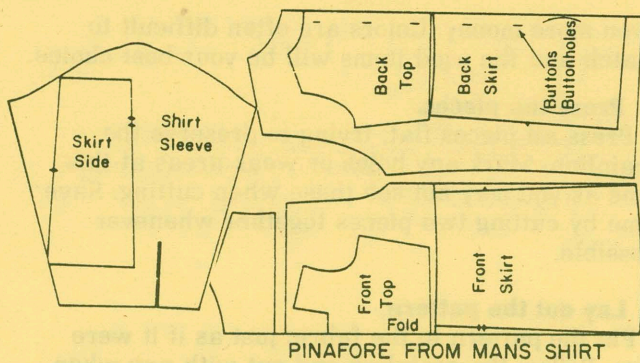
Here are three examples of layouts that have been done for makeover projects.



GIRL'S JUMPER FROM WOMAN'S DRESS

BOY'S SHIRT FROM MAN'S SHIRT





### 7. Construct the garment.

Use the same general techniques for constructing a makeover garment as a new garment. Even though the fabric is old you want your garment to look like new, so a lot depends on how accurately you cut and sew.

Careful construction, pressing, and fitting will help you create a fashionable garment. Additional resources from your county Extension office can help you with the construction of your garment.

By giving "new life to old clothes" you not only save on your clothing dollars, you gain a great deal of personal satisfaction from having made something out of nothing.

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