

## THE ULTIMATE THRIFTING GUIDE

You know that mom at the school who's always wearing the perfect outfit? The one who seems to have an unlimited supply of cute handbags? If she's not driving an Italian sports car, then there's a good chance she's a savvy thrift store shopper.

***Thrift store shopping has a mixed reputation, for sure.***

In some circles, you might get a raised eyebrow for showing off that fur vest you picked up for \$12. But who cares? The thrift store is one of the best secrets to keeping your closet full of stylish pieces—outfit makers, really—without over-spending.

Beyond the potential for raised eyebrows, there's one other downside. Thrifting isn't easy, and doesn't come naturally to all shopping divas. Fortunately, you're about to skip the thrift shopping learning curve. With these 9 tips, you'll be thrifting like a pro this weekend.

Onward — secondhand treasures await!  
And don't worry, I won't tell a soul.

# 1

## Sometimes New is Better

It's easy to get carried away with bargain hunting.



Even if a bin full of dollar lingerie and undies are on sale for 99 percent off, it's one deal you don't want to partake in. We gotta draw the line somewhere. Pay the extra bucks for clean underwear.

# 2

## Focus on the Hunt

Your thrifting goal is to find deals on pieces you'll wear.



But it's a process that takes time, and even some repeat visits. You may spend an hour in Goodwill and leave with nothing.

Said another way, the thrift store is not the place for last-minute, grab-and-dash shopping.

If you need an outfit to wear to tonight, you're better off going to the mall. The mall's wider selection and more consistent quality serves you well when you're in a hurry.

Frequency is  
key...the more you  
go, the more you  
find good stuff.

~Virginia, LiveLoveDiy.com

You can spare yourself some frustration by focusing on the process instead of the outcome. Think of thrifting as an opportunity to sharpen your eye for detail and also your creativity. (It beats a two-hour session of Candy Crush, for sure!)

***Flex your detective skills by looking for tags and also garment flaws.*** The ultimate thrift store find is a pair of never-worn, designer jeans that still have the tags on them. And, the next-greatest prize is the name-brand blazer that's missing a button.

Find that prize and you can march right up to the sales associate and ask for a discount on the damaged piece!

***Use your creative brain to see new life in old garments.*** Shop the entire store with an open-mind — you're on the hunt for fabrics and patterns you love. Women's, men's, kids, it's all fair game.

If that amazing piece doesn't fit, think about how it can be resized or repurposed economically. A tailor can adjust the waistband of a skirt, for sure. But how about that top that's way too small? Could you make into a scarf? Or those petite pants, do they have a new future as crops or capris?



# 3

## Have a Total Cost Per Wear Mindset

Before you buy anything, do a total cost reality check.



How much will that piece cost including tailoring and/or cleaning? Then consider how often you'll actually wear that garment. If you know it's going right into your regular rotation, it may be a good deal to invest \$30 in it.

If it will only see the light of day for a costume party, your cost threshold should be much lower.

# 4

## Search for Tags

The best used garment is the one that's never been worn.



People buy clothes they will never wear. Or retailers donate unsold merchandise to local thrift stores. So keep an eye open for those extra-special goodies.

# 5

## Bring the Right Stuff

A few practical tips will keep you from going bonkers on shopping day.

- ✓ ***Leave the kiddos at home.*** Thrifting is your time!
- ✓ ***Wear leggings and a cami.*** Assume there's no dressing room, unless you know otherwise. Wear tight clothes so you can try on out in the open.
- ✓ ***Bring your tailor's rate card,*** or at least have an idea of what alteration will cost.
- ✓ ***Bring cash.*** Shopping with cash keeps you on budget.
- ✓ Sammy Davis of SammyDVintage.com recommends ***bringing tissues, hand sanitizer and spot stain remover.***

# 6

## Do a Walk-Through

A musty thrift store means musty clothes.

When you arrive in a thrift store, do a quick walk-through before you focus in on the clothes. Does the place smell funny? A musty thrift store means musty clothes.

If the store passes the sniff test, get a lay of the land. Note how the store is organized (or not) and decide how you'll tackle the inventory. I like to be straightforward about it and work my way from the front to the back of the store, skipping past sections that are unlikely to have anything workable for me (like men's shoes).



# 7

## Shop Near Affluent Neighborhoods

Are you in the market for gently used designer wear?



Identify neighborhoods that are likely to house the folks who buy designer clothes, and then donate them after a

season or two. You want to shop at the thrift stores that get those donations!

# Chat Up the Sales Associates

A friendly sales associate is your best ally when thrifting.

A friendly sales associate is your best ally when thrifting. He or she can fill you in on all kinds of useful information, including:

- ✓ ***When the store puts out new inventory.*** The best time to shop is right after the new stuff gets put on the shelves. This is when the pro thrifters show up, because they know the best goods go fast.
- ✓ ***Seasonally, when the store receives the most donations.*** Thrift stores benefit when people tend to clean out their closets in the spring and donate winter wear over the holidays.

Most of us don't have the time to thrift every weekend, but we can make time seasonally if we know there's a good chance of finding great deals.

# 9

## Inspect Everything

Before you lay down any cash, inspect the garment carefully.



Check seams, the buttons, zippers and armpits for tears and stains. Smell it, too. Some clothes just stink permanently, and you don't need those

pieces in your closet. If you see a missing button, ask for a discount. If you see armpit stains, just put it back on the rack.



# 10

## Haggle

It doesn't hurt to ask for a lower price.



You know what's better than an amazing Theory blazer for \$10? An amazing Theory blazer that's \$10 and 30% off because it's missing a button.

If you see damage or a deodorant stain or anything else, ask for a lower price.



# 11

## Be a Repeat Customer

Thrifting gets easier the more you do it.

**Join the club where every purchase matters!**



As a frequent thrifter, you'll learn the best days, times and seasons to shop. And, you'll develop your eye for spotting the gems in a very cluttered rack of clothes.

There may be other benefits, too. Some stores, including Goodwill, have frequent

shopper programs that offer even more discounts for loyal customers. Club Goodwill REwards gives you 1 point for every \$1, and then a \$5 coupon when you reach 75 points.

If you find a store you like, ask if they have a loyalty program.

# 12

## Be OK Going Home Empty-Handed

Not all bargains have value.



Even if that vintage blouse is only \$5, if it's four sizes too big with yellowish pit stains, it's not a deal. In fact, it's a waste of five bucks.

# Thriftling is a Win-Win

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With a sharp eye, a smidgeon of creativity and the right attitude, you can stock up on interesting and fun pieces for your wardrobe at the thrift store.

And the best part is, you can brag about your thrifting prowess...or not.

Show off your finds and you'll be known as bargain shopper extraordinaire. Or, remain silent and you'll be that mysterious style maven who has all those great handbags.

It's a win-win.

# You May Also Like These

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## How to Clean Thrift Store Clothing

There's nothing I like more than a shopping spree at my local Salvation Army. I never really paid much attention to disinfecting the garments, until I learned that a fashion editor friend of mine received a nasty infection from not cleaning her thrift store purchases properly. This post gives you tips on cleaning and disinfecting your thrift store purchases.

[read more](#)

## Guide to Online Vintage Consignment Stores

One of my favorite childhood memories involves rummaging through the racks of the local Junior League thrift store with my seamstress grandma. A Saturday morning ritual, I never left the shop empty handed. There was always a vintage patent leather clutch or rhinestone brooches or Hermes like silk scarf — with prices tags well under \$5.00.

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