

You are what you wear

Do you know that:

2,700 litres of water is needed to produce a single T-shirt.¹

29,000 litres of water is necessary to produce 1 kilo of raw cotton.²

Only about 20% of a clothing price represents material and labour.³

A t-shirt makes between 18 000 to 50 000 km until it is sold in a shop.^{4 5}

The global textile market pollutes waters with 40,000 to 50,000 tonnes of dye effluents a year.⁶

These are only environmental factors related to fast fashion. And yet, we cannot forget that fast fashion poses other ethical threats, such as the exploitation of labour, including child labour or cruelty to animals. Even though the reality is far from perfect, we should remember the power of change is also in our hands. So when you buy a new piece of clothing next time, be aware that your choice matters and can impact the surrounding world. Not to leave you with just the bitter truth, below I present a few slow fashion tips which will help you to become a more conscious consumer, zero waste adherent and a richer person (literally and metaphorically).

Buy in second-hand and vintage shops

Second-hand and vintage shops may be the source of real treasure. They offer a wide range of clothing or accessories not only from high-street shops but also from designer brands. All you need to do is to have an eye for detail and patience to look for the best garment. But even if you lack these characteristics, there's still something for you! Nowadays, there are many online second-hand shops and apps. Some are dedicated especially to high-quality products from the best materials such as cashmere or silk. They give us the possibility to buy premium products at an affordable price. It is worth mentioning that second-hand clothes are unique - after all – our style is our individual expression.

Check the washing instructions and always stick to them

Read the clothing labels. Sticking to the washing instructions constitutes the best way to prevent damages caused by careless washing and enjoy your garments for a longer time. There are also a few washing tips worth remembering:

- The lower the temperature in which you wash your clothes the better for our planet.
- Run a full load of laundry - the washing machine uses around 20 gallons of water per load.
- Air-dry your clothes.

¹ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/the-impact-of-a-cotton-t-shirt>

² Kirsten Brodde, Saubere Sachen. Wie man grüne Mode findet und sich vor Öko-Etikettenschwindel schützt. 2009, s. 68.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/jul/15/bring-fast-fashion-to-a-standstill>

⁴ Kirsten Brodde, Saubere Sachen. Wie man grüne Mode findet und sich vor Öko-Etikettenschwindel schützt. 2009, s. 85.

⁵ Kirsten Diekamp, Werner Koch. Eco Fashion – Top-Labels entdecken die Grüne Mode. 2010, s. 148.

⁶ Well dressed? The present and future sustainability of clothing and textiles in the United Kingdom. University of Cambridge Institute of Manufacturing. 2006. Available at: www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/sustainability/projects/mass/UK_textiles.pdf

- Wash your clothes when they really need it – sometimes it is enough to make a quick spot-stain removal to keep the items clean and fresh.

Swap or resell your clothes

Find swap groups and events on social media, for instance, Facebook. You can also use apps in which users resell or share their clothes. It is easy, fun... and gives the possibility to get some extra money for small pleasures!

Buy universal and timeless pieces of clothing

Create a foundation for your wardrobe which will include universal and timeless pieces of clothing. Choose items you love wearing and which can be easily mixed with each other. This is called a capsule wardrobe - a limited selection of garments which coordinate well and can be worn in many different ways on various occasions. A capsule wardrobe provides the foundation for our style, helps to make conscious consumer choices (it is easier to rethink our needs if we know what we exactly have) and saves our time spent on choosing outfits.

Repair your clothes

Always consider repairing your clothes instead of buying new ones. A sewing kit is enough... and maybe a little bit of skill.

Recycle

If you decide to throw away a piece of clothing, make sure it cannot be used anymore, for instance, donated to a charity or resold. If you are sure a piece of clothing cannot be used anymore, try to find the best way of recycling it. There are quite a few possibilities for doing so. You can check if your council collects clothes and textiles to be recycled or find recycling points near your place of living. Some stores accept their own clothing items back whereas others offer in-store clothing recycling bins – be aware of that, ask shopping assistants, and check the websites.

Check brands and buy from eco-sources

There are more and more eco brands that appear on the market. This is very optimistic. Yet, I encourage you to have your eyes wide open not to become a victim of greenwashing – a phenomenon in which companies spend more time and funds on marketing themselves as environmentally friendly than on reducing their environmental impact. While buying clothes try to check as much information as you can. And remember - slow fashion is not only about ecology but also ethics - working conditions, human and animal rights.

I believe the aforementioned tips constitute a great foundation for becoming a zero-waste, conscious consumer. If you have any other ideas, please share them in the Comments section. Fingers crossed for your zero-waste slow fashion journey. And remember - it's always more eco not to buy anything, than to buy even the most sustainable piece of clothing!