

Fast Fashion: The Plague that is Rapidly Killing Our Planet

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Over the past 40 years, the term “fast fashion” has been ringing in our ears as a society. But what does it really mean? Fast fashion describes the rapidity of new, inexpensive clothing entering into the retail market, typically from large retailers, and relating directly to trends. This once harmless term has proven to have severe consequences on the state of the environment, contributing to 10% of carbon emissions worldwide, and the industry as a whole is the second largest consumer of water in the world (*Fast Fashion and Its Environmental Impact in 2026*). If these facts do not raise your eyebrows, perhaps this one will: 35% of all microplastics in the ocean are reported to have come from synthetic textiles (*The Environmental Costs of Fast Fashion*). Out of the several trillion microplastics in the ocean right this moment, and more every day, 35% of these come from the shirt you bought from Shein, the new line of clothing styles at Zara, and the sweater your friend purchased from H&M last week. Nearly every individual in today’s society is guilty of partaking in this cheap trend, but it is not too late to stop now. It is up to us, as a world, to help live more sustainable lifestyles, especially in urban areas where trends are fast moving and styles ever changing.

In order to combat this rapid movement, there is a variety of different “reform” shopping experiences that are far more environmentally friendly than fast fashion some being thrifting, learning how to make your own clothes, and buying clothes from ethical, responsibly sourced brands (*5 Alternatives to Fast Fashion*). My personal favorite of these options is creating your own clothes. Not only does this lengthy process provide you with new, unique clothes, but it also helps instill a mindset of patience, slow fashion, and an appreciation for the clothes you have. As someone who grew up with grandmothers and a mother who taught me the ins and outs of textiles at a young age, I can say that I am not often (but sometimes) swayed by the shiny lure of fast, cheap retail options. Slow fashion is an environmentally sustainable movement that respects animals, people, and supports reasonable consumption (*Slow Fashion and Hand Knitting: A Sustainable and Creative Alliance*). There are endless ways to curate your own style, and rather than hurt the environment while doing so, it has become easier to find sustainable alternatives to help inspire creativity and an appreciation for the things you have. What are currently considered “grandma hobbies”, such as knitting, sewing, crocheting, etc., are only viewed this way because the fast fashion industry took hold of society nearly 40 years ago, consequently the average age a grandchild is apart from their grandmother. What a coincidence!

In 2023, there are reportedly enough clothes on the planet to clothe the next six generations of people (*“Textile Zombie” v Fossil Fashion: The Battle to Clean up the Clothing Industry in 2023*). Eighty eight percent of major fashion brands do not disclose their annual volumes of production (*“Textile Zombie” v Fossil Fashion: The Battle to Clean up the Clothing Industry in 2023*). The fast fashion industry continues to exploit workers, create metric tons of textile waste, and utilize incomprehensible volumes of clean water and natural resources, all to

sell cheap clothing that wears out after just a few wears. It's time to stop supporting this industry and start thoughtfully creating our clothing, keeping our world in mind. Of all clothing created in this industry, over 25% of it does not sell whatsoever (*The Environmental Costs of Fast Fashion*), contributing to enormous amounts of textile waste going directly into the landfills, the majority of which made from synthetic fibers that do not biodegrade. Out of the clothes you create for yourself, 100% of them will likely be worn, even if you dislike them, because it took time, effort and hard work to create the piece. It's time for us as a society to stop clicking the purchase button on the Shein cart, and to pick up dusty, old sewing machines, or your mothers knitting needles, and be fashionable, and eco-friendly, all at the same time.

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Citations:

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