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Slow Fashion

Mending to Extend the Life of Clothing



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Globalization and cheap labor have lowered clothing prices so much that many people view garments as disposable—a phenomenon called “fast fashion”. Magazines and other influencers create demand for trendy items each season, inciting us to overfill our closets and toss last year’s fads, leading to a more than doubling of worldwide consumption since 2000. It’s a vicious cycle with a huge pollution footprint. The textile industry expels about 1.2 billion tons of CO₂ per year.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the fashion industry produces 10 percent of humanity’s carbon emissions and 20 percent of global wastewater. Every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is either landfilled or burned. Polyester, a petroleum-based plastic found in about 60 percent of garments, doesn’t break down in the ocean, where half a million tons of microfibers end up every year. It takes about 2,000 gallons of water to manufacture just one pair of jeans, and textile dyeing is the second largest polluter of waterways.

To embrace a more sustainable lifestyle, reject fast fashion; buy good quality, longer-lasting garments; and mend them to prolong their useful life. Whether it’s reattaching a but-

ton, patching a worn sleeve or sewing a hem, mending is a way to love and care for clothing and reject the notion that new is always better.

One option is to rely on a local seamstress or tailor to take care of mending needs. For the do-it-yourselfer, there are many ingenious products available besides needle-and-thread to help complete simple repairs—iron-on patches, fusible interfacing, mending glue and tape—as well as helpful instructional online videos and sewing classes at local fabric stores. SewGuide.com is an excellent resource for step-by-step instructions and creative ideas.

Building upon the vintage-wear market, a new trend has emerged called visible mending. In the past, mended clothes might have been interpreted as exposing a family’s lack of funds or status, but today it’s a concept we proudly embrace. Mending a hole or tear with embroidery is a great way to add whimsy and creative expression. By incorporating colorful threads and fancy stitching techniques, as well as beads, decorative buttons, ribbons and appliqués, we can turn off-the-rack items into unique, wearable art. To cover stains, consider fabric paint to add a pretty flower or bold political slogan.