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## Resuscitating T-shirts



Image: Andrew McLeod

(Mar 31, 2007) Don't throw those unwanted T-shirts in the garbage. With a few simple alterations, your unwanted T-shirt can go green!

When considering eco clothing options, we normally look for organic cotton, bamboo and hemp done up in planet-friendly dyes and manufactured in a fair- trade environment. But there is another possibility. Often overlooked, it's a cross between recycling and reusing what has already been made and discarded. Known as *T-shirt Reconstruction*, *T-shirt Mashups* or *T-shirt Surgery*, this DIY phenomenon embodies everything that's chic about being green!

For a while now, teens to 30-somethings have been cutting up their shirts to create amazing designs. If there's one garment we have in overabundance, it's the T-shirt. Not surprising, since the T-shirt has long held a special place in fashion history. In the '30s and '40s, T-shirts were either worn by soldiers or were the hot property of university phys-ed departments, proudly worn by campus co-eds. By the '50s, Mickey Mouse had shown up on the front and the T-shirt as slogan was born. Hippies tied them up and dyed them every colour imaginable so that by the '70s, the only thing left to do was go black and make them into iconic concert merchandise. Punk rockers took it one step further by ripping, tearing or safety-pinning their shirts. Then it all imploded: T-shirts proclaiming everything from "I was at Sammy's Bar Mitzvah" to corporate slogans flooded the market, and soon enough, the T-shirt became ubiquitous.

Look in your own closet. Chances are you own several T-shirts that you're never going to wear for a variety of reasons. The good news is that with some scissors, a needle and thread (or, for the truly crafty, a sewing machine), you can turn your unwanted drawer-fillers into hip, eco-chic threads. If you need some inspiration, go to the web log site [LiveJournal](#) and wander over to T-Shirt Surgery, where over 13,000 fellow surgeons share tips, patterns and show off their latest creations. Some alterations are simple (turning an older brother's boxy Tupac shirt into a baby tee) while others are ingenious (cutting two shirts down the middle and sewing them together). These savvy DIY designers make everything from skirts and purses to sexy dresses and rock-concert quilts for boyfriends.

Tips on T-shirt surgery aren't just restricted to the web. Publishers have got onto the trend and are producing books of all stripes and sizes. [Rip It: How to Deconstruct and Reconstruct the Clothes of Your Dreams](#) (Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 2006, \$15) by designer Elissa Meyrich has 190 pages of tips and techniques from her classes at her Sew Fast Sew Easy studio in New York. [Generation T: 108 Ways to Transform a T-shirt](#) (Workman Publishing Company, 2006, \$14.95) by Megan Nicolay has projects ranging from the simply modified to more intricate fashions. Nicolay also runs T Parties where organizers first rummage through collections of unwanted shirts at Value Village looking for cotton diamonds in the rough and then bring everyone together to try out various patterns.

One could argue that T-shirt reconstruction is nothing new, but today's approach focuses on appreciating each creation. It may be egalitarian fashion design, since anyone can afford to experiment, but in the end T-shirt surgery takes on an ecological role by rescuing all those unwanted T-

shirts from the landfill.

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