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Recession Proof Your Closet

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Recession Proofing Your Closet: Just because you got laid off doesn't mean your closet has to.

Looking stylish doesn't always have to come with a hefty price tag. In this day and age when lay-offs are happening everyday and 401K plans are shrinking, shopping for that high-ticket designer item may have to take a back seat. But that doesn't mean your wardrobe has to.

While this may not be the time to go aimlessly wandering through the mall making impulse purchases, it is the time to make well-thought out calculated decisions that will help your closet survive the recession. In this issue of FashionFinds.com, we'll speak to fashion and wardrobe consultants that will give you tips on how to recession proof your closet. And the way you're going to do this is by looking for essentials that will take you through out the entire year or at least a season or two.

Lynda E. Jean, owner of Lynda Jean Image Consulting, <http://www.lyndajean.com>, a certified image consultant who works from her two locations in Toronto, Canada and Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, says the right blue jeans can be worn year round. Because jeans are so versatile they can be dressed up with a sexy pair of stilettos or coupled with cute tops, loafers or even T-shirts. Another must-have item would be a classic navy blazer, Jean adds. This will provide a professional look at work, but it can be jazzed up for the weekend by wearing a funky belt, blue jeans and cowboy boots. To create a trendy look, belt some of your jackets. Pearls are versatile as well. They can be worn professionally or you can turn on your evening look by doubling the strand or attaching a brooch to them.

Most clothing items should only be worn during an intended season or two with the exception of blue jeans. But accessories can be worn year round, says BJ Wilson, wardrobe consultant and owner of BJ Wilson & Company, <http://www.bjw-fashion.com/about.html>, an image wardrobe consulting firm in Fort Worth, Texas. Gold is the hottest metallic right now so investing in a nice gold necklace and matching earrings will be cost effective and can be worn year round, she adds. "Gold will still be popular this fall and winter."

But for those of you who are fortunate enough to do a little shopping, here's what's popular this spring: dresses, the Maxi dress, white jeans, Gladiator sandals, gold accents including jewelry, handbags and shoes, feminine blouses/ruffles, neutral colors such as bone, khaki, beige and tan, says Misty Kimbrough, wardrobe consultant at BJ Wilson & Company.

But you should keep in mind that most of the items listed above are trends and will be out of style in a year or two. "If you are really shopping on a budget, stick with buying basics that do not go out of style such as slacks, jeans, cardigans, T-shirts, etc.," Wilson says. "These are items that you will be able to wear spring after spring." You'll also want to spend the least amount of money on trends such as sandals, blouses and dresses. What you want to do is invest in your basic wardrobe without spending a lot on trendy clothes. Instead, you'll want to wear wardrobe staples with a trendy pair of shoes or a necklace which will keep you trendy without breaking the bank.

For those of you looking to get a little more wear out of your items, here's what Wilson says can take you through spring and summer: a white cardigan set, a basic colored polished cotton pant and skirt, such as: black, brown, navy or khakis, a spring jacket, such as a trench coat or some other light weight jacket, a ¾ sleeve white-cotton button up shirt, and a ¾ sleeve T-shirt. Three-quarter length sleeves are the perfect length for maximum wearing time through spring and summer and the T-shirts can be dressed up and dressed down and even carry and added plus— providing comfort in the heat, Wilson adds.

In addition to blue jeans, Jean believes that people should look for medium-width pants and stay away from trendy skinny jeans or wide-legged pants. For instance, dark wash jeans with no tears will take you from season to season safely. Also, higher-waisted jeans with the traditional five pockets are best. "You can still look very current by embellishing your classic pieces with colorful accessories," Jean says. "You can never go wrong with classics because they are so versatile."

Adding color to your wardrobe will definitely spice things up. "Color always gives us an emotional lift, so even a great red or pink lipstick will help," Jean says. Beautiful cuff bracelets, large earrings and bejeweled necklaces are in this season. And

don't think you have to spend tons of money on these items. Target has a great selection and so does the famous \$10 store Bijoux Terrier, which is located in many airports. This store features colorful bags, pashminas and jewelry— all for the low price of 10 bucks.

One-shoulder tops, jumpsuits and feminine classic sleeveless-dresses are in and can be found at stores like Ann Taylor and Banana Republic, but don't forget to look for bargains. And for those who live in major cities, let's not forget about consignment shops. Consignment shops always have great pieces that are reasonably priced and you may find some beautiful lifetime pieces there, Jean says.

If you're on a budget, pass on the one shoulder tops and dresses, high-platform shoes, full mini-skirts, fully-pleated shorts and high-wedge heeled shoes. These styles are trendy, and, if worn in a few years will scream "passé." Stick to comfortable Ballerina flats, a pencil skirt and classic jacket, pearls and pashminas.

The major takeaway point here is to purchase basic pieces. Items such as black slacks, dark jeans, white blouses and colored T-shirts can be coordinated so many different ways that it will appear as though you have more clothes than you really do. Accessories also make a huge difference, Morgan Moe, wardrobe consultant at BJ Wilson & Company says.

For example, try wearing a black skirt with a white blouse. You can pair it with a pearl necklace and bone heel for one look, with a patent heel and skinny black patent belt for a second look and a hot pink heel with a chunky hot pink necklace for another.

"The options are endless when you have the right basics," Moe says. Also the more solids and basic colors you wear, the more options you have. Items with embellishments, crazy prints and distinct details will limit how often you wear them because people will remember them, whereas black slacks can be worn everyday with a different top and no one would notice you are wearing the same pants day after day, Moe explains.

However, if you just have to have a printed item and are totally in love with it, you're going to have to get creative, Jean says. Memorable items like prints can be worn with classic staples, e.g. a printed blouse with a pant suit by day and at night skinny pants, heels and belted with some fun jewelry.

Now the trick with getting multiple wears out of jeans is changing up your tops. You're going to have to wear a top that hits above the pockets so the pockets are visible one day, and then to wear it with a longer tunic so the pockets are not visible the next day. "No one will know you wore the same jeans," Moe insists.

So let's get back to the basics. You want to have a three-piece suit that will include: pant, skirt and a jacket in a basic color. Of course a suit is dressy and you may not need to wear it everyday, but with these pieces you will have a suit when you need it; plus they are great when not worn together, Moe adds. The pant and skirt can become your everyday basic pant and skirt and the jacket can be worn with jeans or other bottoms. You'll also want to be sure to throw in, a nice pair of jeans, a solid cardigan set, and a white cotton shirt. "The number of outfits you can wear with these pieces would amaze you and those are the pieces you want to say "yes" to," Moe affirms.

However, if you have nothing to spare, but spare change, there are a few trends you'll want to pass on, and Moe tells you why.

Maxi Dress—This long dress is all the rage right now but is hardly appropriate to wear anywhere and will not be all the rage in a year or two.

Gladiator Sandals—Right now you are seeing very strappy flat sandals, most with ankle straps. Ankle straps are very unflattering for many body types. They make your legs look shorter and wider than they really are. A small wedge or heel is always more flattering to the legs, plus they will not be around for very long.

Oversized Bags—The carryall bag seems beneficial to help carry loads of your personal belongings around with you, but make you look sloppy and actually can create disorganization. Don't let a huge bag be the focus of your outfit and find something that fits your body size and is truly the right size for you.

Leggings — Because of their comfort, I see people wearing leggings all time. Still, the truth is they are out of style and unflattering for most people.

The Harem Pant—This is a brand new trend that we have not seen before and it is not a good one. These loose fitting ankle pants seem comfortable but the way they are banded at the leg and overly relaxed through the thighs is not a flattering look on anyone. I would avoid this trend all together. Do not confuse this with a straight leg ankle pant that may taper to the leg but is not banded to the leg and is straighter through the thighs. These are more flattering and still fashionable.

The above named items are too trendy, and have the words bad investment written all over them.

When times are hard and money is funny, the most important thing to do is set your own personal budget and look for sales to help keep costs down, Kimbrough advises. "A complete basic wardrobe can be completed at any budget because it can be purchased anywhere from Kohls, Target, and JCPenney, to Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, and high-end boutiques," she says. "Again, invest in the basics first and spend what is left on trendy pieces," Kimbrough reiterates.

So if you're on a budget, the best thing to do is keep it simple. And don't forget to shop your own closet, Jean suggests. "Many of us have hidden treasures there that we have not used creatively," she says. "Ask a friend how they would wear certain pieces and you can do the same for them. The objective can be very valuable. Also, swap those pieces that bore you

with a friend who will have a new appreciation for them. Very often, we simply tire of our clothes, even though they would make many others happy.”

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