

12 Tips for Thrift Store Shopping

If you don't yet shop at thrift stores, why not? If you picture dingy floors, bad lighting, and torn clothing heaped together, you might be surprised. There are a few like that in every town, I'm sure, but for the most part, **they are a veritable gold mine of unclaimed wealth.**

With the sketchy economy, it's a no-brainer way to save money. But even when the economic situation is in full bloom, it is a practical, reasonable, and easy way to stretch your family's dollars. **If your family lives on one income, and you're the home manager assigned the job of managing the spending, then consider shopping at thrift stores your income contribution** – you'd be surprised at the money saved.

1. Go in With a Plan...

Know ahead of time what you need. Sometimes they can be a bit overwhelming, and each location has its own organizing system, making it a bit challenging to find what you need. So if you go knowing you're looking for 12-24 month-old boy's khakis, and size 8 black dress shoes, it can be a lot less stressful.

2. ...But Be Open-Minded

That said, **keep your eyes open for any surprising deals.** It's hit-or-miss with thrift stores, so sometimes you really hit the jackpot of gear your family truly needs. If you weren't necessarily shopping for swimsuits, but you see a darling one in your daughter's size this summer, then snag it up. You need to make sure what you find is actually something you *need* – otherwise, you're just buying clutter, and you're not saving money. Even so, think outside just your immediate family, and consider your extended family, your friends, or unexpected gift ideas. You could find birthday gifts for all your nieces and nephews, or you might find throw pillows in just the right shade your friend is looking for.

3. Look For Quality Brands...

The older I get, the less the inexpensive brands work for me – I wish they did, but Old Navy clothes *rarely* fit me well. Banana Republic, Ann Taylor, or Calvin Klein, however, usually fit me like a glove. Because over 90% of my wardrobe comes from thrift stores, I can afford these quality brands. **You'd be surprised the amount of well-made, expensive clothing is hiding in thrift shops, just waiting to found.** You have to dig for it, but it's there. My kids can wear Baby Gap and Gymboree, thanks to thrift stores.

4. ...But Also Try New Brands

Keep in mind, however, **that there might be some quality pieces in brands you've never heard of,** or with the tags completely missing. Check for holes, stains, missing buttons, and loose seams, and pass on something if it looks pretty worn or stretched out. But sometimes the brands you don't know are actually really high-end European brands, well worth their money.

5. Try Things On

Always try things on. Just because it's a beautiful silk Ann Taylor skirt doesn't mean you should buy it. **If it doesn't fit well, then it's a needless purchase and will only clutter your closet.** And different brands size things differently, so you can't assume anything by the number on the tag.

6. Don't Go With Kids

Sure, you may have to bring them sometimes. But if you're armed with a detailed list, it can be hard to get much accomplished at a thrift store when you have little ones to watch. **Shopping at thrift stores means having to sift through lots of aisles of crammed-full racks.** If you have to bring your kids, bring them to our thrift store where we have a Kids Korner for them to stay entertained.

7. Know Your Local Store's Sale Days

Many local Salvation Army stores have half-off Wednesdays. Other stores have similar days, so **call and ask for their regular sale schedule.** A \$4 pair of shoes is cheap, but when they're \$2 – even better!

8. If You Really Need Something, Ask

If you're in the market for a very specific item, and you've been returning to the store for several weeks in search of it, **it wouldn't hurt to ask an employee to keep their eye out for it.** You can't expect them to bend over backwards, because thrift stores usually have piles of items that come in unexpectedly. But if you let them know you're looking for a light purple Ralph Lauren wool scarf, and then see one come by, then maybe they'll remember you.

9. Find Ways To Repurpose

Think creatively when you thrift shop. I was looking for a Christmas tree skirt a few weeks ago, but I happened upon a perfect vintage tablecloth with red and green flowers. It was thick, durable canvas with a beautiful red fringed border – and it will work better as a tree skirt than I had originally planned. Sheets make great curtain liners, and mismatched silverware and dishes work well in a play kitchen.

10. Stockpile; Think Long-Term

We don't need to buy clothes for our kids for a *long* time, because my mother-in-law has containers of boys and girls clothes of all sizes waiting to be grown into. She stops by thrift stores weekly, and is always on the lookout for her grandkids' clothes. We're probably set for at least two years, because she thinks longer-term when she thrift shops. **If you have the storage to stockpile, then consider your family's long-term needs.**

11. Go Often

If you don't find anything one week, try again in a few weeks. A store's inventory changes constantly, so you might strike gold one week, and come up with nothing the next. **Make thrift store shopping part of your regular home management routine.**

12. Go With Cash

Finally, leave your debit card at home. **When you're armed with cash, you'll be more selective with your purchases**, and will therefore think more level-headedly about the value of items. When you stick to a budget, then thrift stores are a money-saver. When you go way over, then you're buying more than you need – emptying your wallet and filling your closets. Aim for the opposite