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## Q&A with Clothing Swap Expert Wendy Tremayne

Posted by **BRAD TUTTLE** Thursday, September 24, 2009 at 8:43 am

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Wendy Tremayne is the founder of **Swap-O-Rama-Rama**, a hub for clothing swaps around the country. In a Q&A with The Cheapskate Blog, she discusses ways to spruce up old clothes and discarded textiles in the swaps' DIY workshops, along with lots of tips that are certainly new to me. Example: Bras can be easily transformed into great water bottle holders.

### Cheapskate: Swaps seem to be free-for-all, so can you offer any good tips for people trying to locate clothes that are cool and fit right -- and to do it quickly?

Wendy Tremayne: Many people buy or swap the same styles and colors over and over. We get habitual about our clothing and the way we look. I recommend that swappers turn to each other, to the people that they don't know at the event (strangers) and ask "is it me?" as they hold up a garment. This invites newness into our lives. Strangers see us in ways we can not see ourselves. At Swap-O-Rama-Rama events we don't have any mirrors for this very reason.

### CS: What does the average swapper like better -- that swaps are good for the environment, or good because you're getting free clothes?

WT: Some people come to their first Swap-O-Rama-Rama on the lure of free clothes. Then, once inside, they discover our sewing areas, workshops on how to modify and transform used clothes and silk screening and through these they discover their own creativity. Once a person modifies a garment with their own creativity and their own hands, they infuse it with meaning and it becomes special, something that they would not kick to the curb. This is important since each American is responsible for more than 30 lbs of textile waste a year. Our creativity also adds meaning to the world we live in. Only 100 years ago everything around us was made by us or someone we knew. It's no coincidence that we did not have heaps of trash lining the streets. We can again allow our objects to be infused with stories and experiences. This is real value. This creative discovery that takes place at swap-o-rama-rama spawns the habit of recycling and because the discovery is personal and comes from within us it's not as likely to fall away if being green stops being trendy.

### CS: What are some common mistakes that first-time swappers should avoid -- what they bring, how they behave, etc.?

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**what they bring, now they browse, etc.:**

WT: When you bring your unloved items to a swap-o-rama-rama, never bring non-clothes items unless they're textiles that can be made into clothes, and be sure everything is clean. You don't have to rush. You need only look at the massive amounts of free clothes to remember that there is abundance. So relax and take your time. I always find myself throwing garments across the room to people I don't know and shouting "this would look great on you!" I get distracted that way, and I also make a lot of new friends.

**CS: What are some of the quickest and easiest DIY modifications to spruce up clothes?**

Most items can be fitted to our unique shape and size with a few with darts. Darts are quick and easy to make. A great example is in seen in the moo-moo which easily transforms into a lovely dress. T-shirts are ripe for transformation. They can be hacked into hundreds of forms and many t-shirt mods require no sewing. Silk screening, which we offer at Swap-O-Rama-Rama immediately transforms the old into the new again with the swipe of a squeegee. Bras easily become pocketbooks when the cups are sewn together and a strap is added. They also make great water bottle holders.

**CS: What are some of your favorite items you've gotten at swaps?**

I look for things people have already changed and hacked because I appreciate the care imbed in their work. I'm also a sucker for unique prints from the 1970s or earlier. I also look for whatever is most abundant like T shirts, and I probe myself for how these may be transformed and put back into use. I am mindful about preventing things from reaching the landfill so if I can popularize the use of a particular thing that's in excess I'll try to do it.

**CS: What charities do you recommend that people donate excess clothing to? What are some of your personal favorites?**

It is important to ask a charity what will be done with the clothes. Some charities box the clothes and load them into shipping containers that are shipped to places like Africa and to less industrialized countries. These shipments have a negative effect on the communities who receive them. For them a Yankees T-shirt or a gap hat costs less money than they would spend on their own locally made and crafted items, the result is that local crafting suffers and dies off. It takes only a couple of generations for the skills of local craft to be forgotten. This leaves these communities more dependent on industrialized nations for their garbage and ill equipped to create for themselves. I recommend that we know where our donations are going and how they're being used.

Read more: [Q&A with Clothing Swap Founder Suzanne Agasi](#)

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20 21 22 23 24 25 26
27 28 29 30

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