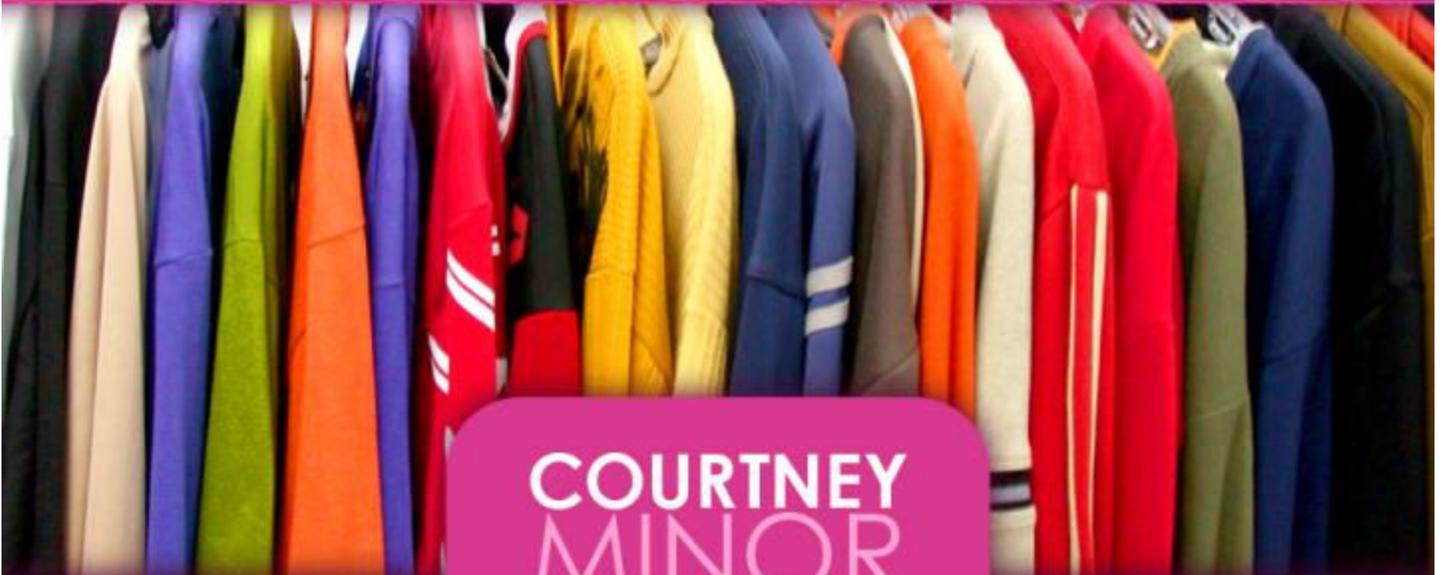




HOW TO PLAN A CLOTHING SWAP



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HOW TO PLAN, ORGANIZE, AND HOST A SUCCESSFUL CLOTHING SWAP

By Courtney Minor

Fashion-lovers and shop-a-holics know what it's like to have a full closet but nothing to wear. Sometimes you fall in love with a dress at the store, but only wear it a couple of times before you decide it's just not your style anymore. After all, styles and trends change so quickly; who knows what you're going to like a few months or a year from now. All of those unworn clothes start to take up precious space in your closet, but just throwing them out isn't an option. So how do you clean out your closet AND find new clothes to add to your wardrobe that you WILL wear? Host a clothing swap!

WHAT IS A CLOTHING SWAP?

Clothing swaps are meetups that allow friends, neighbors, and even whole communities to come together to exchange their gently used clothing, shoes, jewelry, and accessories. A clothing swap can be a large community event that draws in hundreds of people, or it can be a small party for a group of friends. Everyone that attends the clothing swap brings in a certain amount of clothing that he or she doesn't wear anymore to contribute to the "stock" or "pile". During the swap, all of the attendees look through the clothing and take whatever they like. Pretty simple idea, right? Large swap events often allow any type of clothing for all sizes, and for men, women, and children. Smaller clothing swaps usually have a specific type of clothing that is accepted. For example, women often hold small clothing swap parties just for women, and only accept women's clothing. Children's clothing swaps are also popular. Children outgrow their clothes so quickly, so it's nice to have a place to pass those clothes on to others.

WHY HAVE A CLOTHING SWAP?

There are so many benefits to having a clothing swap. With the “go green” trend that has become so popular over the past few years, more and more people are becoming conscious of the waste caused by throwing out wearable clothing. People are finding ways to re-use and recycle their unwanted clothing by re-selling or donating it. It is also becoming more common to shop at thrift stores, vintage stores, and other second-hand shops. Clothing swaps are just a more direct and social way of recycling your clothes. Instead of dropping them off at a donation center, you are trading them with others.

Another major benefit of clothing swaps is saving money. Your unwanted clothes are your currency, so no money is needed! Some larger clothing swaps will ask for a small donation or ticket fee to help cover the cost of the event space and refreshments, but many clothing swaps, especially small, private swaps, are free. Instead of shelling out money at the mall to buy new clothes, you get to trade in the clothes you don't wear for clothes you will wear. In a time when the economy is still unstable, this is a really great way to save money.

A lot of us tend to accumulate mounds of clothes, shoes, handbags, etc. throughout the year, so cleaning out our closets is a necessary evil. The problem is that you don't always know what to do with the stuff you clean out. A clothing swap is the perfect reason to start digging through everything and decide what you do and don't want. Your closet will thank you when all of that space is freed up, and you will feel better without the extra clutter.





HOW TO PLAN A CLOTHING SWAP

While thrift stores, charities, and other organizations often plan larger, community-based clothing swaps that are open to the public, private clothing swap parties are also becoming really popular. Shopping, catching up with friends, and enjoying delicious food and drinks are three things everyone loves, so it's no wonder these parties are so much fun! Maybe one day you can plan a big clothing swap for everyone in your community, but before that, it's best to start small by having a swap party with a group of friends. Planning a clothing swap might seem like a lot of work, but it's really easy if you just follow a few simple steps.

STEP 1: SWAP PARTY DETAILS

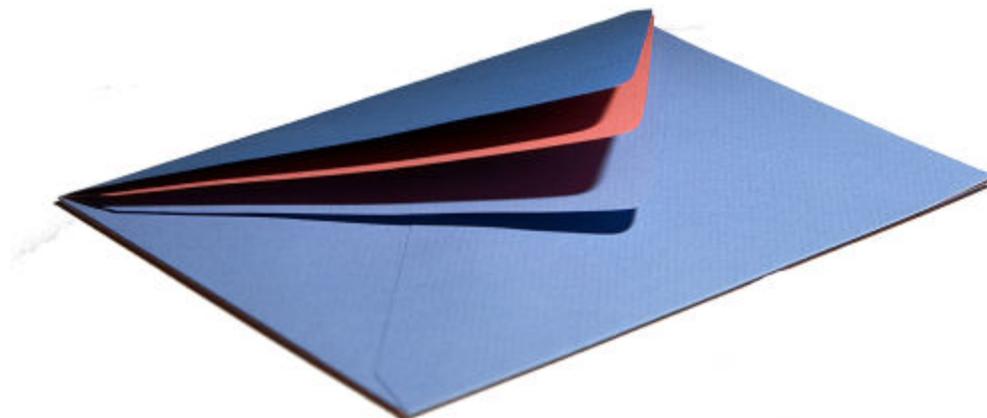
Before you can host a clothing swap, you have to figure out the basics: Set a date, pick a time, choose a location for the party, and make an invite list. When you choose the date and time for the party, do your best to pick a time that is beneficial for the group you're inviting. Weekends are usually when people have the most available time, but weeknights work too. You can host the clothing swap in your home or at a local venue. For your first swap, it will be easiest to use your own home, but if that doesn't seem like a good option for you, you can contact local restaurants to talk about booking a private room. Many restaurants have party rooms or event spaces for occasions such as this, but make sure you call before sending out the invitations. Also, some places will charge you a fee to rent the space, so decide whether or not that is something you are willing to pay.

Now that you have the location and other details figured out, you need to make an invite list. Clothing swaps are a great way to get some of your best friends together, but swap parties are also a fun way to connect with co-workers or neighbors. A group of 10-20 people is ideal, allowing you to have plenty of clothes for everyone to choose from. A smaller group of around eight people is perfect for close friends, while 20 is just about the limit before you start having to do *major* planning. If you have a small group of people, then you can easily pick a date and time that works for everyone.

Step 2: Invites and Instructions

You have your invite list, so now it's time to send out the invitations. Invitations can be as simple as a phone call, but if people don't have something with the date and time written on it, it's likely they will forget, so a more formal invitation works best. You can e-mail cute e-vites to everyone on your list, or make a Facebook event to let all of your friends know that anyone is welcome. Mailing paper invitations is always a nice way of doing it, since people tend to take better notice of physical mail than e-mail.

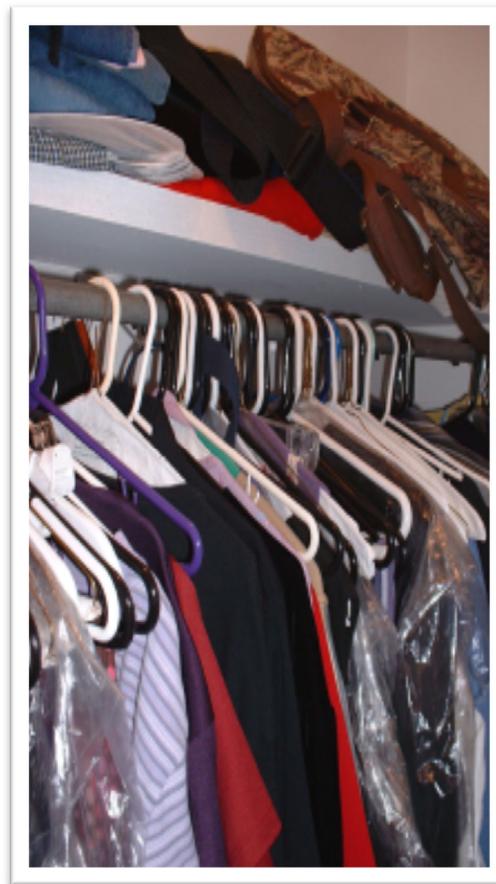
In the invites, you should instruct everyone to bring a bag full of clothing and accessories that they don't use anymore. Some people might want to bring a large trash bag full of stuff, while others might only have a few things to contribute, so try to include some sort of "sizing rule" to ensure that everyone brings about the same amount. You could also make a rule that everyone can take as many items as they bring, but it will make things much easier if everyone just brings the same number of items. You can tell everyone to fill a trash bag with clothes, or limit it to about 10 pieces per person at a smaller swap. Make it clear that everything should be clean and free of stains, holes, or major damage. It's true that "one man's trash is another man's treasure," but no one wants to be stuck with actual trash. Also, you can make a rule to exclude things like athletic wear, pajamas, or unseasonable clothing, but that is optional.



Step 3: Clean Out Your Closet

You'll be swapping clothes too, so make sure you have time to clean out your own closet before the party. This may end up being harder than planning the clothing swap; a closet cleanout can be extremely overwhelming! Just remember your mission and go at it head-on. Look through everything, and be firm about your choices.

Make a pile for things you want to keep, things you want to bring to the clothing swap, and things that should be thrown out. Old, ratty clothes with holes and stains should be thrown away immediately. When deciding which pieces to keep and which pieces to bring to the swap, you have to be realistic about what you do and do not wear. If you bought it over three months ago and it still has tags on it, chances are you're not going to end up wearing it. Anything that is in good condition but doesn't fit, isn't your style anymore, or just hasn't been worn in a while should also be added to the swap pile. Everything else can be put back into your closet.





Step 4: Organize

When planning any type of party or event, organization is key, and a clothing swap is no different. To prepare for the swap, make sure you have everything you need to keep things running smoothly during the party. Some things you will need are boxes or bins to put the clothes in during the swap, at least one full-length mirror so that everyone can try on their items, and bags for everyone to bring their new clothes home in. At a smaller gathering, everyone can just bring their clothes with them when they arrive at the party, and then set them out in piles. If you have 10 or more people, you might want to ask everyone to drop off their clothes at least a few days before the party. This allows you to organize things beforehand so that people can easily find what they want.

If everyone drops off their clothes before the party, you'll want to sort through everything and put them into bins. You can sort by type of garment (tops, jeans, shorts, jackets, etc.) or by size. The more clothes you have, the more specific each bin should be (for example, Size Small Tops, Size 8 Pants). Depending on the mood of the clothing swap, you might consider getting some clothing racks to hang items up instead of having them in piles, especially if you know you're going to have a lot of formal dresses, suits, or expensive items. Using boxes or bins to sort the clothing is simplest and usually works just fine. Label everything and set it out before the swap begins. If you are hosting the swap in a public venue, make sure you get there early enough to set everything up, and enlist some help to get all of the clothes there.

People like to try things on, so try to provide some type of dressing area. If the clothing swap is taking place at your home, designate one of the bedrooms as the fitting room, and let everyone take turns trying on their items. You should have a full-length mirror in the fitting area and another one out in the swapping area.

Step 5: Refreshments

Clothing swaps can be as formal or informal as you want, but everyone loves having something to eat or drink while they're shopping and mingling. Always have water available for thirsty guests. If you're having a bunch of friends over for a girl's night, having wine or cocktails is always fun. Chips, crackers, and fruit are great snack options to set out for your guests. Again, for a more party-like feel, serve tasty hors d'oeuvres. If you're holding your clothing swap at a local restaurant, sometimes they'll be willing to provide drinks or appetizers for a discounted fee, or they may be included with the rental fee for the private/party room. Another option is to have a pot-luck; tell everyone to bring their favorite snack or drink to share. A pot-luck also takes some of the pressure off of you when planning the swap. Whichever path you take, your guests will appreciate having something to nibble on and quench their thirst.



Step 6: Time to Swap

Everything is ready to go, and your guests are arriving. Set a cut-off time of about 15-20 minutes after the party starts to give everyone a chance to show up. Guests can meet, eat, and drink in the mean time. Once everyone has arrived, give everyone a shopping bag to put their new clothes in, and then let them have at it. Everyone can make their way around the room, dig through the piles, bins, and boxes, and try on anything that catches their eye. Swap time can get a little crazy if things aren't organized, which is why preparing beforehand is so important. Again, having things sorted by size, as well as having everything labeled, allows everyone to quickly find the pile or box that they want to look through.

Step 7: Mingle

The shopping portion of the swap should only take about an hour for a small group, but any get-together is about the social aspect just as much as the actual event. Leave a little extra time for everyone to talk, hang out, have a drink (or two!), and eat some of those yummy appetizers and snacks. If your swap is on a weeknight and you have somewhere to be the next morning, make sure the invitation is clear about the end time of the swap. Two to three hours is the perfect amount of time to leave open for your swap party.





Step 8: Leftovers

Everyone brought in clothes, shoes, jewelry, handbags, etc. that they don't wear anymore, and it's likely that some of those things won't find a home that night. Some things will get passed over and left behind, so you have two options for those items:

1.) Put anything left behind into a box that you can store in your closet and save it for your next swap! Chances are, you had a great time, and so did your friends. You're probably going to want to start planning swap parties every few months, or your friends might plan one of their own. Whatever got left behind may not have caught anyone's eye this time, but bring it to the next one! Other people will be there that didn't have a chance to grab it before, so it's bound to get a new home soon.

2.) The other option for the "leftovers" is donation. This is a great option because after everyone got new pieces to add to their wardrobes, you can also help out others by dropping off unwanted items at your local charity or thrift store. All of the items should be in good condition anyways, so put the items that were passed over into a bag, and mark it for donation. Bring it to your local Goodwill or Salvation Army the next day.

Now that you've had one clothing swap, you're going to want to have more! They are so much fun, and trading clothes with your stylish friends every once in a while is an easy and money-saving way to change up your wardrobe. Try having a clothing swap once every season so that you can keep your closet clean and your style fresh.