Complete Thrift Store Costume Creation Kit

Your Ultimate Guide to Sustainable, Show-Stopping Halloween Costumes

Print this comprehensive guide and transform thrift store finds into amazing costumes while saving money and the planet!

Part 1: Thrift Store Shopping Checklist

BEFORE YOU GO

Preparation Steps:

☐ Measure yourself accurately:
 Bust/Chest: inches Waist: inches Hips: inches Inseam: inches Shoulder width: inches Sleeve length: inches
☐ Research costume ideas (3-5 options)
☐ Check store hours and sale schedules
\square Bring measuring tape, phone for research, reusable ba
☐ Set budget: \$
☐ Review size conversion charts (below)

CLOTHING SECTION PRIORITIES

Start Here:

☐ Formal/Evening Wear - Best for period costumes Look for: Vintage dresses, suits, tuxedos, gowns • Costume potential: Victorian, 1920s flapper, vampire, elegant witch ☐ Work/Professional - Versatile base pieces Look for: Blazers, button-downs, slacks, pencil skirts Costume potential: Office worker, detective, mad scientist, professor ☐ Athletic/Outdoors - Character costumes Look for: Sports jerseys, hiking gear, vintage athletic wear • Costume potential: Athlete, explorer, zombie survivor, retro character ☐ Casual/Everyday - Foundation pieces Look for: Jeans, solid color shirts, layering pieces Costume potential: Any "normal person" character base ☐ Seasonal/Holiday - Hidden gems Look for: Ugly sweaters, vintage holiday items, quirky pieces • Costume potential: Ironic costumes, specific character needs **ACCESSORIES & HIDDEN TREASURES**

☐ Jewelry Counter

- Oversized/statement pieces for drama
- Vintage brooches (attach to anything)
- Chains, beads, costume jewelry
- Cheap = perfect for customizing

☐ Hats & Belts

- Any hat can be modified
- Belts transform silhouettes
- Scarves = capes, sashes, wraps

□ Shoes Section

- Check men's AND women's
- Look beyond your normal style
- Boots, heels, character shoes
- Remember: it can be spray-painted!

☐ Linens & Curtains

- Fabric for capes, draping, wrapping
- Often better quality than costume fabric
- Curtains = instant dramatic cloaks
- Sheets = ghost base, medieval garb, togas

☐ Home Decor

- Picture frames (remove glass for props)
- Candle holders, vases (spray paint for props)
- Faux flowers (costume embellishments)
- Baskets, boxes (character accessories)

☐ Toys & Games

- Plastic swords, toy props
- Board game pieces (decorative elements)
- Stuffed animals (animal costume parts)
- Action figures (inspiration/reference)

FABRIC & CONDITION CHECKLIST

What to Accept:

- ✓ Minor stains (can be hidden or incorporated into distressing)
- ✓ Missing buttons (easy to replace or remove all)
- ✓ Small holes in non-critical areas
- ✓ Dated styles (often perfect for costumes!)
- ✓ Wrong size if alteration is simple.
- ✓ Ugly patterns (can be dyed or partially covered)

What to Avoid:

- X Large holes in prominent areas
- X Broken zippers in critical places
- X Strong odors that won't wash out
- X Delicate fabrics that will fall apart

- **X** Extensive damage requiring professional repair
- X Items way too large or small (unless for parts/fabric)

QUICK DECISION MATRIX

For each item, ask:

- 1. Can I use this as-is? → BUY
- 2. Can I modify this easily? → BUY
- 3. Does this spark a costume idea? → BUY
- 4. Is this cheaper than buying new? \rightarrow BUY
- 5. Will this work for multiple costumes? \rightarrow BUY
- 6. Is this unique/hard to find elsewhere? → BUY

If you answered "no" to all → PUT IT BACK

STRATEGIC SHOPPING TIPS

□ Shop on weekdays (less crowded, better selection) □ Visit monthly (new donations cycle in) □ Check all sections, not just your usual ones □ Look at men's AND women's sections regardless of your gender □ Check children's section for small accessories □ Ask staff when new items are put out □ Join store mailing lists for sale announcements □ Bring friend for second opinions and creative ideas
COLOR STRATEGY
Neutrals (Always grab if cheap): \square Black (most versatile costume color) \square White (easy to dye, works for many costumes) \square Brown/Tan (natural, vintage, earthy costumes) \square Gray (professional, vintage, gothic costumes)
Statement Colors (Character-specific): ☐ Red (bold characters, period costumes, vampires) ☐ Purple (royalty, witches, mystics) ☐ Green (forest characters, retro, specific characters) ☐ Blue (water, sky, professional, retro themes)



Nart 2: Size Conversion Charts

VINTAGE TO MODERN WOMEN'S SIZING

Understanding Vintage Sizing: Vintage sizes run MUCH smaller than modern sizes. A vintage size 12 ≈ modern size 4-6!

Vintage Size	Modern Size	Bust	Waist	Hips
8	00-0	30-31"	22-23"	32-33"
10	0-2	32-33"	24-25"	34-35"
12	4-6	34-35"	26-27"	36-37"
14	6-8	36-37"	28-29"	38-39"
16	10-12	38-39"	30-31"	40-41"
18	12-14	40-41"	32-33"	42-43"
20	14-16	42-43"	34-35"	44-45"

VINTAGE TO MODERN MEN'S SIZING

Vintage Size	Modern Size	Chest	Waist	Sleev e
36	XS-S	36-37"	28-29"	32-33"
38	S-M	38-39"	30-31"	33-34"
40	M-L	40-41"	32-33"	34-35"
42	L-XL	42-43"	34-35"	35-36"
44	XL-XXL	44-45"	36-37"	36-37"

ERA-SPECIFIC SIZING NOTES

1950s-1960s:

- Very fitted through waist
- Longer sleeves
- Size 12 = modern 4-6

1970s:

- More relaxed fit
- Longer lengths
- Closer to modern sizing

1980s:

- Oversized trend
- Shoulder pads (removable!)
- Similar to modern

1990s-2000s:

- Very similar to modern
- Low-rise bottoms
- Slim fits

QUICK FIT CHECK IN STORE

Without Dressing Room:

☐ Hold shoulders to your shoulders (should align) ☐ Wrap waistband around neck (should meet = fits waist) ☐ Length check (hold up to body) ☐ Sleeve length (arm extended, measure)

Costume Fit Rules:

- Slightly large? Perfect (easier to alter down)
- Slightly small? Can work if:
 - Worn open (jackets, shirts)
 - Layered over other clothes
 - Used for parts rather than a full costume



🮨 Part 3: Color Theory for Costumes

COLOR WHEEL BASICS

Primary Colors: Red, Blue, Yellow

Secondary Colors: Orange, Green, Purple

Tertiary Colors: Red-orange, yellow-green, blue-purple, etc.

COSTUME COLOR SCHEMES

1. MONOCHROMATIC (Easiest) Use different shades of one color

- Example: Light blue shirt + navy pants + dark blue accessories
- Best for: Professional, elegant, or minimalist costumes
- Thrift Strategy: Collect various shades in your chosen color family

2. COMPLEMENTARY (Most Dramatic) Use colors opposite on color wheel

- Red & Green
- Blue & Orange
- Purple & Yellow
- Best for: Villains, bold characters, attention-getting
- Thrift Strategy: Look for vintage pieces in these combos

3. ANALOGOUS (Most Harmonious) Use colors next to each other on wheel

- Blue, blue-green, green
- Red, red-orange, orange
- Best for: Natural, forest, ocean, vintage themes
- Thrift Strategy: Easiest to find pieces that work together

4. TRIADIC (Most Balanced) Use three colors equally spaced on wheel

- Red, yellow, blue
- Orange, green, purple
- Best for: Superhero, bold, balanced costumes
- Thrift Strategy: Start with one dominant color, add accents

CHARACTER-SPECIFIC COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

HEROES & GOOD CHARACTERS:

- Blues (trust, calm, noble)
- Bright reds (courage, passion)
- White/light colors (purity, innocence)
- Golds (wealth, power, goodness)

VILLAINS & DARK CHARACTERS:

- Deep purples (mystery, magic, evil royalty)
- Black with red (danger, darkness)
- Greens (envy, poison, corruption)
- Deep reds (blood, danger)

PERIOD COSTUMES:

- Victorian: Deep jewel tones, blacks, burgundy
- 1920s: Metallics, black, champagne, Art Deco

- 1950s: Pastels, bright primary colors
- 1970s: Oranges, browns, mustard, avocado
- 1980s: Neons, metallics, bold primaries

THRIFT STORE COLOR STRATEGY

Start With Neutrals:

- 1. Black or brown base
- 2. Add ONE accent color
- 3. Use metallics or white as highlights

Color Matching Tips:

- Bring a color sample (photo on phone)
- Check colors in natural light (near window/door)
- Remember: You can always dye darker
- Patterns work if the main color matches the theme

EMERGENCY COLOR FIXES

Too Bright?

- Tea stain for aging
- Fabric dye in a darker shade
- Wear with dark neutrals

Colors Don't Match?

- · Add a unifying accessory (belt, scarf) in a third color
- Make one color the strong focus, others minimal
- Use black/white to separate competing colors

Too Dull?

- Add metallic accessories
- Bright makeup/face paint
- Statement jewelry or props



Part 4: Distressing & Aging Techniques

BASIC DISTRESSING TOOLS

You'll Need:

- Sandpaper (medium and fine grit)
- Scissors or craft knife
- Cheese grater or a wire brush
- Spray bottle with water
- Coffee or tea bags
- Salt
- Washing machine
- Bleach (use carefully)

TECHNIQUE 1: NATURAL AGING

Coffee/Tea Staining:

- 1. Brew extra-strong coffee or tea
- 2. Soak fabric 20-60 minutes (longer = darker)
- 3. Wring out and let air dry
- 4. Iron if needed

Result: Vintage, yellowed, or aged appearance

Variation: Spot-apply with a spray bottle for uneven aging

TECHNIQUE 2: FABRIC DISTRESSING

Sandpaper Method:

- 1. Place cardboard inside garment (protects the back side)
- 2. Rub sandpaper on stress points:
 - Knees and elbows
 - Pocket edges
 - o Collar and cuffs
 - Seams and hems
- 3. Work gradually—you can add more, but can't undo

Result: Worn, lived-in, vintage look

Cheese Grater Method:

- 1. Pull fabric taut over a hard surface
- 2. Lightly drag the cheese grater across the surface
- 3. Focus on areas that would naturally wear

Result: Fuzzy, distressed texture

TECHNIQUE 3: HOLES & TEARS

Strategic Tearing:

- 1. Make a small cut with scissors
- 2. Pull fabric apart (creates a natural-looking tear)
- 3. For fraying: Pull threads around the hole
- 4. Wash the item to increase fraying

Best for: Zombie, apocalypse, poor/vagrant characters

Safety Tip: Don't distress near critical seams or in areas that might continue tearing while wearing

TECHNIQUE 4: DIRT & GRIME EFFECTS

Realistic Dirt:

- 1. Mix cocoa powder + water to a paste
- 2. Apply with sponge or brush to:
 - Hem (splashed mud)
 - Knees (kneeling dirt)
 - Elbows (ground contact)
- 3. Let dry completely
- 4. Seal with hairspray

Result: Muddy, outdoor worker, survivor look

Soot/Smoke Effects:

- 1. Scrape black eyeshadow or charcoal into powder
- 2. Apply with a brush or fingers
- 3. Concentrate on:
 - o Cuffs and collar
 - Chest area (soot settling)
 - Random smudges

Result: Chimney sweep, factory worker, fire survivor

TECHNIQUE 5: SELECTIVE BLEACHING

CAUTION: Test on the hidden area first! Only for cotton/natural fibers.

Method:

1. Fill spray bottle: 1 part bleach, 3 parts water

- 2. Spray lightly on areas to lighten
- 3. Watch carefully (happens fast!)
- 4. Rinse immediately when the desired effect is reached
- 5. Wash thoroughly

Result: Sun-faded, worn, vintage appearance

Pattern Creation:

- Tie fabric with rubber bands before spraying (tie-dye effect)
- Use stencils for specific patterns
- Splatter for random fading

TECHNIQUE 6: BLOOD & STAIN EFFECTS

Fake Blood (Washable):

- Mix corn syrup + red food coloring + a tiny bit of chocolate syrup
- Apply where appropriate for character
- Let it dry completely before wearing

Oil Stains:

- Use petroleum jelly or cooking oil
- Pat with baby powder to set
- Great for mechanic, worker costumes

Wine/Food Stains:

- Actual coffee, tea, or juice
- Apply and let dry
- Spray with fixative (hairspray)

TECHNIQUE 7: WASHING FOR WEAR

Aggressive Washing:

- 1. Wash with towels and jeans (rough tumbling)
- 2. Use hot water (fades colors)
- 3. Add 1/2 cup salt (increases fading)
- 4. Dry on high heat
- 5. Repeat 2-3 times

Result: Soft, worn, faded appearance

AGE-APPROPRIATE DISTRESSING GUIDE

Victorian/Historical (100+ years):

- Heavy tea staining
- Frayed hems
- Faded colors
- Some small holes
- Yellowed whites

Vintage (1920s-1970s):

- Light tea/coffee staining
- Slightly faded colors
- Minor wear at stress points
- Softened fabrics

Modern Worn (Recent but used):

- Minimal staining
- Slight fading
- Fuzzy fabric surface
- Worn collar/cuffs

Post-Apocalypse/Zombie:

- Heavy dirt/mud
- Multiple tears
- Blood effects
- Extreme fading
- Missing pieces



🮭 Part 5: Prop Making Templates

PROJECT 1: Cardboard Sword or Weapon

Materials:

- Cardboard (boxes)
- Aluminum foil
- Gray or silver paint
- Duct tape or hot glue
- Craft knife

Instructions:

- 1. Draw weapon shape on cardboard (double the width you want)
- 2. Cut out TWO identical shapes
- 3. Sandwich a piece of rolled cardboard between them for handle strength
- 4. Glue/tape edges together
- 5. Wrap the handle in duct tape for grip
- 6. Cover the blade in aluminum foil OR paint silver/gray
- 7. Add details: paint darker metal, add "jewels" (buttons, beads)

Templates: Sword, dagger, axe, staff

PROJECT 2: Paper Maché Mask Base

Materials:

- Balloon
- Newspaper strips
- Flour + water paste (1:1 ratio)
- Paint
- Elastic cord

Instructions:

- 1. Blow up a balloon to head size
- 2. Dip the newspaper strips in paste
- 3. Apply to the balloon in multiple layers (let dry between)
- 4. When dry (24hrs), pop the balloon
- 5. Cut mask shape from hardened papier-mache
- 6. Cut eye holes
- 7. Paint and decorate
- 8. Punch holes at the sides, add elastic

Variations: Animal faces, skull, fantasy creatures

PROJECT 3: Crown or Tiara

Materials:

- Cardboard or craft foam
- Gold/silver paint or aluminum foil
- Hot glue
- Decorations (buttons, beads, gems from thrift jewelry)
- Elastic or headband

Instructions:

1. Measure head circumference

- 2. Cut a strip of cardboard: head measurement x 4" tall
- 3. Draw crown points or a shape at the top
- 4. Cut out the shape
- 5. Paint or cover in foil
- 6. Hot glue decorations
- 7. Form into a circle, glue ends together
- 8. Attach to a headband or add elastic

PROJECT 4: Wings (Angel, Fairy, Dragon)

Materials:

- Wire hangers (2)
- Pantyhose or sheer fabric
- Duct tape
- Elastic straps
- Decorations

Instructions:

- 1. Bend hangers into a wing shape
- 2. Connect at the center with duct tape
- 3. Stretch pantyhose over each wing frame
- 4. Secure pantyhose to the frame with tape
- 5. Create a back harness with elastic
- 6. Decorate: glitter, feathers, paint

Size Guide:

- Small (child): 18" wings
- Medium (teen): 24" wings
- Large (adult): 30+ wings

PROJECT 5: Staff or Wand

Materials:

- Long stick/dowel from thrift store
- Ribbon or fabric scraps
- Hot glue
- Decorations (crystals, beads, carved details)
- Paint (optional)

Instructions:

1. Sand sticks smooth if rough

- 2. Paint or stain if desired
- 3. Wrap handle section in ribbon/fabric (glue ends)
- 4. Add decorative elements at the top (crystal, star, orb)
- 5. Seal with clear coat if painted

Variations:

- Wizard: Gnarled stick, crystal top
- Fairy: Smooth wand, star top, ribbons
- Witch: Rough stick, minimal decoration
- Druid: Natural stick, carved symbols

PROJECT 6: Book of Spells or Old Tome

Materials:

- Old hardcover book from the thrift store
- Craft paper or old paper
- Leather scraps or brown paper
- Hot glue
- Decorations (buttons, jewelry pieces)
- Paint or markers

Instructions:

- 1. Remove original book pages (recycle or save)
- 2. Glue in aged-looking paper (tea-stained)
- 3. Cover the exterior in leather or painted paper
- 4. Add raised decorations (glue gems, metal pieces)
- 5. Painthe t cover to look ancient
- 6. Add "spell" writing inside pages

PROJECT 7: Steampunk Goggles

Materials:

- Swimming goggles (thrift store)
- Brass/copper paint
- Gears, buttons, watch parts (from thrift jewelry)
- Hot glue
- Elastic band

Instructions:

- 1. Remove original strap, replace with vintage-looking elastic
- 2. Paint frames brass/copper

- 3. Hot glue gears and mechanical parts around frames
- 4. Add decorative rivets (painted buttons)
- 5. Weather with dark brown paint (wipe off excess)

PROP SAFETY GUIDELINES

✓ No sharp edges (sand or tape) ✓ Secure all glued parts thoroughly ✓ Test props before wearing ✓ Check venue rules (some ban prop weapons) ✓ Make props obviously fake (bright colors, soft materials) ✓ Don't point prop weapons at people

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Part 6: Cost Tracking Sheets

INDIVIDUAL COSTUME BUDGET TRACKER

ltem	Thrift Store	Price	Retail Equivalent	Saving s
		\$	\$	\$
	<u> </u>	\$	\$	\$
	<u>-</u> · <u></u>	\$	\$	\$
	<u>-</u> - <u></u>	\$	\$	\$
		\$	\$	\$
	- 	\$	\$	\$

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TOTALS:					
 Thrift Items: \$ DIY Materials: \$ Total Spent: \$ Retail Equivale TOTAL SAVING Percentage Sav 	nt: \$ 6S: \$				
Time Investment:					
Shopping:DIY/Alterations:Total Time:	h	ours			
Worth it? ☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Mayb	е			
Would do again? ☐ Ye		Notes:			
FAMILY/GROUP CO	OSTUM	E TRA	CKER		
Group Theme: Budget: \$				Number of People:	Total
Person Character	Items	Cost	Retail Price	Saving s	
		\$	\$	\$	
		\$	\$	\$	
		\$	\$	\$	

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		\$	\$	\$		
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GROUP TOTAL	.S:					
AverageRetail E	ent: \$ e per Person: \$ quivalent: \$ SAVINGS: \$		_			
ENVIRONME	NTAL IMPAC	CT CAL	CULAT	OR		
Plastic Avoidar costume =		•	c costume	es NOT purcha	sed:	_ × 1.5 lbs plastic pe
Items Diverted	from Landfill:	Number	of thrift ite	ems repurpose	d:	
Carbon Footpr savings:		ne produ	ıction ≈ 15	5 lbs CO2 Thrift	t costume	≈ 2 lbs CO2 Your

Part 7: Inspiration Gallery - 50+ Costume Ideas

HISTORICAL & PERIOD COSTUMES

1. Victorian Lady/Gentleman

• Shop For: Long dress or suit, high-necked blouse, vest, lace details

• **Budget:** \$8-15

• DIY: Add cameo brooch, styling

2. 1920s Flapper

• Shop For: Straight drop dress, long beaded necklaces, feather boa

• **Budget:** \$10-18

• **DIY:** Headband with feather, fringe addition

3. 1950s Housewife/Greaser

• **Shop For:** Full skirt + cardigan OR jeans + leather jacket

• **Budget**: \$6-12

• **DIY:** Styling, hair, props (rolling pin, comb)

4. 1970s Disco

• Shop For: Bell bottoms, polyester shirt, platform shoes

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Add sequins, afro wig

5. 1980s Workout

• Shop For: Leotard, leg warmers, sweatband, athletic shoes

• **Budget:** \$5-10

• **DIY:** Neon accessories, scrunchies

OCCUPATIONAL COSTUMES

6. Mad Scientist

• **Shop For:** White coat/button-down, goggles, pants

• **Budget**: \$4-8

• **DIY:** Distress coat, crazy hair, props

7. Detective/Film Noir

• Shop For: Trench coat, fedora, suspenders, vintage suit

• **Budget:** \$10-20

• **DIY:** Press pass, magnifying glass

8. Pirate

• Shop For: White shirt, vest, pants, boots, bandana

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Sword prop, "dirt" weathering, accessories

9. Cowboy/Cowgirl

• Shop For: Denim, plaid shirt, boots, hat

• Budget: \$10-18

• **DIY:** Bandana, rope, toy guns

10. Chef

• **Shop For:** White button-down, black pants, apron

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• **DIY:** Chef hat (paper), utensil props

FANTASY & MYTHOLOGY

11. Witch/Wizard

• Shop For: Black dress/robes, cape, hat

• **Budget**: \$6-12

• DIY: Wand, broom, magical accessories

12. Fairy

• Shop For: Flowy dress, tulle, flower crown materials

• **Budget:** \$5-10

• **DIY:** Wings (wire + pantyhose), wand

13. Vampire

• Shop For: Victorian clothing, cape, formal wear

• Budget: \$10-18

• **DIY:** Fangs, pale makeup, blood effects

14. Greek God/Goddess

• **Shop For:** White sheet/dress, gold accessories, sandals

• **Budget**: \$4-8

• **DIY:** Toga draping, laurel crown, gold spray paint

15. Mermaid/Merman

• Shop For: Shimmery dress/shirt, scale-like fabrics, aqua colors

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Tail, shells, sea accessories

ANIMALS & CREATURES

16. Cat

• **Shop For:** Black clothing, turtleneck, leggings

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• **DIY:** Ears, tail, whiskers (makeup)

17. Fox

• **Shop For:** Orange/brown clothing, furry vest

• **Budget**: \$6-12

• **DIY:** Ears, tail, face paint

18. Owl

• Shop For: Brown/tan clothing, cape-like jacket

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Feather details, eye mask, beak

19. Deer/Fawn

• Shop For: Brown dress/outfit, soft fabrics

• **Budget:** \$7-12

• **DIY:** Antlers (branches), spots (face paint)

20. Dragon

• **Shop For:** Green/red clothing layers, reptile textures

• **Budget:** \$10-18

• DIY: Wings, tail, scales (craft foam), horns

HORROR & SPOOKY

21. Zombie

• **Shop For:** Any clothing (will be distressed!)

• Budget: \$3-8

• **DIY:** Heavy distressing, blood, pale makeup

22. Ghost

• Shop For: White sheet or flowing white clothing

• Budget: \$2-5

• **DIY:** Cut eye holes, creative draping

23. Skeleton

• **Shop For:** Black clothing (tight-fitting best)

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• **DIY:** White fabric paint or tape for bones

24. Mummy

• **Shop For:** Old white sheets (cut into strips)

• Budget: \$2-5

• **DIY:** Wrap strips around body, tea-stain

25. Frankenstein's Monster

• Shop For: Oversized jacket, boots, dark clothing

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Green face paint, neck bolts, scars

POP CULTURE & CHARACTERS

26. Rosie the Riveter

• Shop For: Denim shirt, red bandana, jeans

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• **DIY:** "We Can Do It!" poster

27. Where's Waldo

• **Shop For:** Red/white striped shirt, jeans, glasses

• **Budget:** \$6-10

• **DIY:** Beanie, walking stick

28. Artist/Painter

• **Shop For:** Overalls, paint-splattered clothes, beret

• Budget: \$7-12

• **DIY:** Add paint splatters, brushes, palette

29. Tourist

• Shop For: Hawaiian shirt, shorts, fanny pack, camera

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Tacky accessories, map, sun hat

30. Mime

• Shop For: Black and white striped shirt, black pants

• **Budget**: \$5-8

• **DIY:** White face paint, beret, suspenders

COUPLES COSTUMES

31. Salt & Pepper Shakers

• Shop For: White shirt/black shirt

• Budget: \$4-8 per person

• **DIY:** Labels, shaker caps (cardboard)

32. Plug & Socket

Shop For: Brown/tan clothingBudget: \$5-10 per person

• **DIY:** Cardboard prong/socket shapes

33. Peanut Butter & Jelly

• Shop For: Brown shirt/purple shirt

Budget: \$4-8 per personDIY: Labels (printed paper)

34. Ketchup & Mustard

• **Shop For:** Red shirt/yellow shirt

• Budget: \$4-8 per person

• DIY: Bottle shape costume, labels

35. Old Hollywood Stars

• Shop For: Formal vintage wear for both

Budget: \$15-25 per personDIY: Glamorous styling, props

GROUP/FAMILY COSTUMES

36. Wizard of Oz Cast

• **Shop For:** Dorothy (blue gingham), Scarecrow (plaid/straw), Tin Man (silver), Lion (brown fur)

Budget: \$8-15 per personDIY: Character-specific props

37. Addams Family

• Shop For: All black clothing, vintage styles

• **Budget:** \$6-12 per person

• **DIY:** Makeup, wigs, accessories

38. Scooby-Doo Gang

• **Shop For:** Character-colored outfits (Fred-ascot, Daphne-purple, Velma-orange, Shaggy-green)

• **Budget:** \$8-15 per person

• DIY: Accessories, Scooby ears/collar

39. Playing Cards

• Shop For: White clothing or cardboard

• **Budget:** \$5-10 per person

• **DIY:** Card suit symbols, numbers

40. Crayons

• Shop For: Solid colored clothing

• Budget: \$4-8 per person

• **DIY:** Cardboard crayon tip hat, label

LITERARY & ART-INSPIRED

41. Book Character (Harry Potter, etc.)

• Shop For: School uniform pieces, robes

• **Budget**: \$10-18

• **DIY:** House colors, wand, glasses

42. Famous Painting

• **Shop For:** Picture frame, clothing matching artwork

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Frame to hold, face paint to match painting style

43. Shakespeare Character

• Shop For: Renaissance-style clothing, doublets, long dresses

• **Budget**: \$12-20

• **DIY:** Ruffs (paper/fabric), props (skull, dagger)

44. Sherlock Holmes

• Shop For: Tweed jacket, cape, deerstalker hat

• Budget: \$10-18

• **DIY:** Pipe, magnifying glass

45. Alice in Wonderland Characters

• Shop For: Blue dress (Alice), suit (Mad Hatter), etc.

• Budget: \$8-15 per person

• **DIY:** Character-specific accessories

FOOD & BEVERAGE COSTUMES

46. Pizza Slice

• **Shop For:** Tan/beige triangle shape materials

• Budget: \$5-10

• **DIY:** Red felt "sauce," yellow "cheese," felt "toppings"

47. Bunch of Grapes

• Shop For: Purple clothing

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• **DIY:** Attach purple balloons all over

48. Coffee Cup

• Shop For: Brown/white clothing

• **Budget**: \$4-8

• **DIY:** Cardboard cup shape, coffee brand logo

49. Sushi Roll

• **Shop For:** White clothing, black fabric

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• DIY: Wrap in black "seaweed," add colorful "fillings"

50. Ice Cream Cone

• **Shop For:** Brown clothing (cone) + colorful top (ice cream)

• **Budget**: \$5-10

• **DIY:** Triangle cone shape, cherry on top

NATURE & SEASONS

51. Mother Nature

• Shop For: Green dress, natural fabrics, earth tones

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Flowers, leaves, vines, nature crown

52. Autumn/Fall Season

• Shop For: Orange, red, brown, gold clothing

• **Budget**: \$6-12

• **DIY:** Attach real or fabric leaves, acorns

53. Garden Gnome

• Shop For: Red jacket/vest, brown pants, boots

• **Budget**: \$8-15

• **DIY:** Pointed hat, white beard, rosy cheeks

54. Scarecrow

• **Shop For:** Plaid shirt, overalls, boots, straw hat

• **Budget:** \$8-15

• **DIY:** Straw stuffing (raffia), patches, stick arms

55. Tree

• **Shop For:** Brown clothing, green accents

• Budget: \$5-10

• **DIY:** Branches (attach twigs), leaves, bark texture

Photo Documentation Sheet

BEFORE & AFTER TRACKER

BEFORE: Photo Date:	Items Purchased:	
•		
•		
Condition:		
	I: Techniques Used: □ Distre □ Adding accessories □ Wea	ssing □ Dyeing □ athering □ Other:
Challenges Faced:		Solutions Found:
AFTER: Photo Date:	Final Cost: \$	Time Invested:
	1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5 (stars)	_
iours Satisfaction Level.		
		What I'd Do Differently:

W Quick Reference: Costume Emergency Kit

Keep These in Your Car/Bag for Thrift Shopping:

☐ Measuring tape

☐ Phone (for research and photos)
☐ Small sewing kit (safety pins, needle, thread)
☐ Reusable shopping bag
☐ Hand sanitizer
☐ List of measurements
☐ Costume ideas list with keywords
□ Budget tracker
☐ Comfortable shoes (lots of walking!)
At-Home Costume Repair Kit:
☐ Hot glue gun + extra glue sticks
□ Fabric glue
☐ Safety pins (various sizes)
☐ Needle and thread (multiple colors)
☐ Scissors (fabric and regular)
☐ Measuring tape
□ Seam ripper
□ Velcro strips
□ Elastic
☐ Buttons (assorted)
□ Sandpaper
☐ Coffee/tea (for staining)
☐ Spray paint (metallics, black, white)
☐ Face paints/makeup



FROM EXPERIENCED THRIFT COSTUME CREATORS:

- **Tip 1: Shop the "Wrong" Season** I find the best summer clothes in winter and vice versa. Everyone else is focused on current season, so off-season items are plentiful and cheap!" Sarah, 10+ years thrifting
- **Tip 2: Check ALL Departments** I've found men's blazers that fit perfectly as oversized women's pieces, children's accessories that work for adult costumes, and even pet costumes that had great materials for props." Marcus, costume designer
- **Tip 3: Think in Pieces, Not Outfits** "Never look for a 'complete' costume. Instead, collect interesting pieces throughout the year. When Halloween comes, you'll have options to mix and match." Jennifer, sustainable fashion blogger
- **Tip 4: Embrace the Weird** "The ugliest, most dated items often make the BEST costume pieces. That hideous 70s polyester? Perfect for disco or retro characters!" Alex, theater costumer
- **Tip 5: Build Relationships** "Get to know thrift store staff. Tell them what you're looking for. They often give me first dibs on interesting items before they hit the floor." Carmen, professional cosplayer
- **Tip 6: Document Everything** "Take photos of items in-store if you're unsure. Text friends for opinions. I've avoided so many purchases I'd regret by getting a second opinion via photo." Taylor, DIY enthusiast
- **Tip 7: Buy Multiples of Basics** "When you find cheap black pants, white shirts, or other basics in your size, buy several! They're the foundation of countless costumes." Devon, family costume coordinator
- **Tip 8: Learn Basic Alterations** "Just knowing how to hem pants, take in a waist, or remove sleeves opens up SO many more thrift options. YouTube is your friend!" Rachel, sewing teacher
- **Tip 9: Shop with a Color Palette** "I decide on 2-3 colors for my costume before shopping. This helps me avoid getting overwhelmed and ensures pieces work together." Jordan, art director
- **Tip 10: Calculate Per-Wear Cost** "I think about whether I can wear pieces again (not just for costumes). A \$15 jacket I'll wear all winter is way better value than a \$30 one-time costume." Sam, budget blogger

Year-Round Thrift Costume Strategy

MONTHLY THRIFTING SCHEDULE:

November-December:

- Shop for formal wear (holiday donations!)
- Grab vintage Christmas items (repurpose for costumes)
- Stock up on fabric items (curtains, sheets)

January-February:

- Best time for suits and formal wear (post-holiday donations)
- Look for winter coats (can become capes, period costumes)
- Check for unique accessories

March-April:

- Spring cleaning donations arrive
- Good time for casual clothing bases
- Look for Easter dress-up items (repurpose)

May-June:

- Summer clothes arrive (lightweight costume bases)
- Graduation suit donations
- Check for athletic wear

July-August:

- Start serious Halloween shopping (beat the rush!)
- Lots of variety as people do summer cleaning
- Grab anything interesting even without specific plan

September:

- Peak costume shopping begins
- Prices may increase at Halloween-focused stores
- Shop early in month for best selection

October:

- Focus on finishing touches and accessories
- Expect picked-over costume-obvious items
- Look for unusual pieces others overlook

Final Pre-Halloween Checklist

ONE WEEK BEFORE:

☐ Try on complete costume ☐ Test all attachments and props ☐ Practice makeup if needed ☐ Check for comfort (can you sit, eat, use bathroom?) ☐ Verify costume is appropriate for all planned events ☐ Take photos for memory/documentation ☐ Make any final adjustments ☐ Gather emergency repair supplies
DAY OF HALLOWEEN:
\square Lay out complete costume \square Pack emergency kit: safety pins, tape, makeup touch-ups \square Charge phone for photos \square Eat before putting on complicated costume \square Give yourself EXTRA time for costume application \square Have fun and feel proud of your sustainable creation!

🎉 Share Your Success!

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE:

Hashtags to Use: #ThriftStoreHalloween #SustainableCostume #SecondhandHalloween #EcoFriendlyHalloween #ThriftFlip #UpcycledCostume #ZeroWasteHalloween #DIYCostume #ThriftStoreFashion #SustainableFashion

What to Share:

- Before/after transformation photos
- Cost breakdown (show your savings!)
- Quick video of your process
- Tips that worked for you
- Encourage others to thrift their costumes
- Tag thrift stores you used (support small businesses!)

Photo Tips:

- Good lighting is everything
- Show details up close
- Include props and a full outfit
- Natural poses are best
- Have fun with it!

Remember: The best costume is one that makes YOU feel amazing, fits YOUR budget, and reflects YOUR creativity. Thrift store costume creation is an adventure—enjoy the process, learn from each attempt, and celebrate the sustainable magic you're making!



Questions? Share your costume challenges and successes with the thrift costume community online—we're all in this creative, sustainable journey together!