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Sustainable shopping: where to find a puffer jacket that doesn't warm the Earth.

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<https://theconversation.com/sustainable-shopping-where-to-find-a-puffer-jacket-that-doesnt-warm>

## **Sustainable shopping: where to find a puffer jacket that doesn't warm the Earth**

A good winter coat is an investment, and puffer jackets are a timeless classic that speak to the mountaineering, outdoor lifestyle of Patagonia and Kathmandu, whose names alone evoke wintry wildernesses and wild geese in flight.

If you're looking to replace your old winter coat, there is every possibility that one of the Michelin-man-looking puffer jackets has caught your eye for its warmth, lightness and associations with trekking through the wilderness.

However, the environmental, ethical and social impacts of your puffer jacket might not leave you feeling so warm and fuzzy. Here is a guide to the considerations you should keep in mind when looking for your winter jacket, and where to find the best options.

### **Quality of materials**

The most common fibres for winter coats are wool or its synthetic imitation, acrylic. For puffer jackets, the outer shell is typically made from polyester. Polyester is a synthetic fibre derived from a non-renewable petrochemical origin, the use of which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

According to the Materials Sustainability Index, recycled polyester is a better environmental choice than virgin polyester, and its use is becoming more common. Emerging recycled fabrics from used coffee grounds are also in use in outdoor wear – see Mountain Designs.

The fluffy interiors of puffer jackets also need to be considered. A top ethical concern is the treatment of the birds whose down and feathers are harvested for jackets. Reports have emerged of geese and ducks being live-plucked for down and feathers.

Certifications such as the Responsible Down Standard and the Global Traceable Down Standard are a means by which companies can assure consumers that the down in their puffer jackets was ethically sourced, using the best practice of animal care. Each standard ensures there are no live-plucking or force-feeding practices, and that the animals providing down and feathers are humanely treated according to the five freedoms of animal welfare.

However, buying an expensive coat does not automatically mean that a company has its house in order, just as buying cheaper "fast fashion" puffer jackets need not necessarily mean that the down is unethically sourced. Whatever the price of the jacket, check first whether the company has signed up to the Responsible Down Standard.

The main alternative to down is polyester filling, such as the recycled polyester ECOdown. Unlike duck or goose down, ECOdown does not lose its insulating qualities when wet. The flip side is that polyester down is slightly heavier than duck or goose down. Brands that use ECOdown include Trenery and HoodLamb.

There are also other natural alternatives, such as batting made from merino wool, as used by Icebreaker, or the recycled goose down used by Patagonia.

## **Manufacturing processes**

The long supply chains through which our garments arrive can mean that labour abuses continue to occur. The 2018 Ethical Fashion Guide was released this month, so have a look at how local brands have fared in terms of supply-chain transparency. Throughout April, Fashion Revolution Day aim to connect and inform the public about the issues facing the estimated 60 million garment workers worldwide.

Well Made Clothes is a website that allows you to choose clothing that aligns with your values, be they environmental, social, ethical treatment of animals, or all three.

## **Coat care**

The final choices are those you can make as a wearer. For the workaday, bundled-up commuter, choose a high-quality garment in a hard-wearing fabric in a classic style and it will last you many seasons (real seasons as well as fashion's artificial ones).

Again, fibre matters in longevity. Wool coats have a natural insulating quality. Acrylic, a synthetic substitute for wool, can develop pilling and does not have wool's natural advantages.

Selecting a brand that will repair your damaged coat ensures that you remain motivated to care for your garment. Finally, in terms of disposal, brands such as Kathmandu and H&M offer a take-back service at the end of the garment's life (although effective recycling of these garments remains a wicked problem for retailers). High-quality coats will always be in demand at op shops.

## **Why not wear what you wore last winter?**

Retailers might not like this, but you should ask yourself whether you even need a fresh coat and, if so, whether it needs to be bought new. The most environmentally friendly item is the one we already own. Increasing sales of second-hand clothing result in savings in carbon emissions, waste, and water usage per tonne of clothing (see page 38 of this report).

Despite the supposed vagaries of fashion, winter coats are an excellent example of a garment that need not require constant refreshing, but rather can be worn for many seasons if cared for correctly.

However, if you seek a winter wardrobe refresh, the enjoyment of rugging up in a new coat can be experienced at a lower cost economically and environmentally by buying second-hand, whether through eBay or op shops, or swapping or buying informally through friends in your social network. Engaging in the sharing economy through clothing renting platforms such as Lána can allow you to rent a show-stopping coat for a special night out.

Given the many considerations involved in the choice of coat – whether concerns over workers' rights, cruelty to animals, or environmental impact – all we can do is make informed choices according to our individual values. For this reason, my first stop when doing some "sustainable shopping" will always be my existing wardrobe.