

33 Tips that Help You Mix it up when Mixing and Matching Your Wardrobe

By Julie Murphree, of [Julie's Fresh Air](#)

We regularly complain that we can't find anything to wear in our closet. Fortunately, simple, rudimentary steps can be taken to fix the misfortune of the messy closet.

For years, I traveled around the country with some of the most fashionable and inspiring women who represented the cotton industry, including my mom Pennee Murphree. We were part of the National Cotton Women's Committee of the [National Cotton Council](#). Through the course of our time together, I learned lots about fashion and built my own strategies for keeping my wardrobe fresh, versatile and easy to work with.

One of the more important aspects of a quality wardrobe was my ability to extend my wardrobe beyond my budget. The best trick to making my wardrobe look more expensive than it really was involved mixing and matching basic pieces. It's easy too.

So, here are some of my strategies and a few I learned from the women of the cotton industry!

1. **First, consider what you do — what's your lifestyle.** You want to plan your wardrobe around what you do. Are you in an office environment? On the farm? Working from home? Even if most of your time is spent in the seat of a tractor or saddle, you need a foundational wardrobe.
2. **Budget to Build Your "Core" Wardrobe.** You can begin planning for that ideal wardrobe as simply as putting away \$5 to \$10 a week. While you determine your representative lifestyle wardrobe, you'll build a clothes fund quicker than you think you can.
3. **Clear out the Clutter:** Once you've determined your lifestyle requirements for your wardrobe and have begun to set aside a few dollars each week, sort your closet. You might be surprised to discover you've actually got more of your core pieces than you thought. The clothes items you keep will
 - a. Be in good condition
 - b. Require no alterations
 - c. Truly fit you well (regardless of your size)
 - d. Fit your personality
4. **Plan Your "Core" Wardrobe before you go shopping.** Your "Core" Wardrobe should consist of these essential pieces.
 - a. **Denim Jeans** = a quality pair
 - b. **One solid color suit** = regardless of whether you work in an office or not, if active in your community or a volunteer leader for your industry, you need one suit with simple, classic lines. For new graduates, you need one for those upcoming job interviews.
 - c. **One or two basic Tees (both long sleeve and short sleeve)** = cotton or silk and in basic, neutral colors like white, black, gray, light brown and charcoal.
 - d. **One or two basic A-Line Skirts** = Again, in basic, neutral colors



What day-to-day demands influence how you dress? Even casual can be cute with a simple denim jacket and scarf. Separates go a long way.

- e. **One Dress** = with classic lines in a neutral color that you can dress up or down with a jacket or cardigan.
 - f. **One brightly colored Jacket** = that can mix and match with your other pieces
 - g. **One or two cardigans** = in either a light wool or cotton blend fabric
 - h. **A few Camisoles, also called singlets** = in neutral colors
5. **Remember a few basic fashion “Don’ts” before heading out the door to shop.**
- a. Avoid expensive trends
 - b. Shop with a friend that will be honest and focused on you. Tell her your purpose for the shopping trip.
 - c. Steer clear of fishnet stockings and clothing, sequins in the daylight, cheap fabrics, transparent clothing (see through blouses are so yesterday), and bold prints (remember you’re buying your core wardrobe).
 - d. Don’t go shopping when you’re in a bad mood; this influences bad choices
6. **Speaking of don’ts, don’t worry about purchasing all your needed items all at once.** If you



Check out what others wear to gather ideas for your own wardrobe.

sorted your closet, you should have discovered you already have a few basic pieces. So, your list of basics might be just 3 to 5 pieces. They can be purchased over a period of time.

- 7. **Keep watch of those remaining pieces you still need.** They may show up on sale!
 - 8. **Pre-shop.** Flip through catalogs, fashion magazine and even check out the mannequins in the store windows. Also, pay attention to what others are wearing; especially someone you admire in terms of how she dresses. Ever cruise through the blogs. Julie’s
- Fresh Air will regularly be posting photos and other content about fashion.
- 9. **Purchase well fitting, versatile wardrobe pieces.** Your “core” wardrobe pieces should fit comfortably (not too tight, not too loose) on your body regardless of your size.
 - 10. **Never purchase an item you didn’t try on.** To me, this is a cardinal rule of shopping for clothing. When you try the piece on, sit down, move around, stretch your arms in different directions and really get a feel for how the outfit looks and feels on you. None of us like recalling our personal stories of buying something and discovering it just doesn’t feel right on us once we’ve taken it home.
 - 11. **Focus foundationally on your “core” wardrobe.** You build the foundation first (the suit, a couple of skirts one or two classic Tees in nice silk or cotton blends and more), then add and embellish, mix and match, and enrich season after season, year after year, always keeping the same foundation.
 - 12. **For your “Core” wardrobe pieces, shapes of clothes need to be classically simple.** All pieces must work together, so that a jacket can be worn with not just one skirt or pair of pants, but with two or three, and perhaps with a dress as well. If you find one shape that suits you and that you love in any item (trousers, blouses, sweaters), and if it works as a basic, stick to it. You could even buy several in that shape in different colors.
 - 13. **When purchasing your “Core” items ask yourself, “Will I wear this often?”** Also, “Is this a piece I can wear with at least two to three items already in my closet?”

14. **While building your basic pieces, explore color.** Because you want your wardrobe to be flexible, it's important to make sure you know which colors look good on you and which colors to stay away from. One way to determine this is to get "color draped" where color experts can identify your skin tone and determine whether you fall into the "cool" family of colors or the "warm" family of colors. Some cosmetic counters in department stores can help you with this. But the easiest way is to ask yourself, "What colors do I feel most comfortable in?" we tend to instinctively pick colors that brighten us up. Or, ask family and friends what colors look best on you!
15. **If you're confident in the color scheme you've picked, stick to it!** I fall in the "winter" family of colors, considered "cool." So, I avoid cream whites when buying blouses and always purchase true whites when it's time for me to buy a new basic white tee. This knowledge of what colors look good on you ensures flexibility in the mixing and matching of your core pieces.
16. **Invest in quality pieces.** They last longer and fit well. Some hints on quality include straight seams, snug buttons, quality fabrics, and fabrics that lay well on your body.
17. **Purchase more tops than bottoms when building your "core" wardrobe.** You need to have at least four to five tops for every skirt or pair of trousers you own. Why? People notice your top half more than your bottom half.
18. **Think versatility when building your "core" wardrobe.** A "core" wardrobe lets you work with a few items of clothing in different colors, styles, silhouettes and fabrics that co-ordinate with each other.
19. **Be consistent.** Your "core" pieces are the foundation of your wardrobe. Colors and prints come later as you add tops, scarves, other pieces, shoes and accessories. Tops and bottoms with different printed patterns don't give you the flexibility to mix and match. As a result, the majority of your wardrobe should be plain colors, no more than 25% could be prints.
20. **You've built your "core" Wardrobe; now add more color and prints.** After you've established your core pieces you have more freedom to experiment with patterns and accessories.
21. **But remember, each item of clothing you buy must mix and match with at least two to three other pieces in your existing wardrobe.** This strategy will immediately multiply your options in your closet and make your wardrobe look and feel larger and more creative.
22. **When you bring new pieces home, take a few minutes to mix and match with existing pieces to determine what you can create.** It turns your wardrobe into a creative dress rehearsal. Discover the fun of looking good and well put together!
23. **Employ the simple "That's Cute" Test:** When you've mixed and matched a new outfit, see if you get any compliments that day from what you're wearing. This is a simple test for seeing if the outfit really works.
24. **Attempt to have natural fibers in your "core" wardrobe.** Of course, being from cotton country I'm going to encourage you to find cotton fabrics or nice cotton and wool blends. But good quality fabrics using natural fibers do make a difference.
25. **Mix and match separates instead of dresses.** Dresses limit your ability to mix and match; don't exclude them from your wardrobe simply limit the number of dresses in your closet. This will not only save you money, but gives you more outfits to wear.
26. **Avoid putting fashion "trends" in your "core wardrobe pieces.** While a pair of "skinny jeans'



When building your core wardrobe search for natural fibers and quality blends in your fabrics.

is okay to have in your collection, if it's the only type of jean you have, you'll be purchasing another pair soon. Trendy fashions are typically higher priced. Also, unless a certain brand really fits you well, be careful of falling for expensive brands.

27. **Consider seasonal changes when building your wardrobe.** Begin your core by building your fall/winter basics first as winter fabrics tend to be more expensive. But you can consider some of your core wardrobe pieces working for every season. For example, light silk or cotton blouses and thin wool sweaters can be layered on in colder weather and worn alone in summer.
28. **Built right, your "core" wardrobe will be extremely versatile.** In other words, you can wear the majority of every piece in your closet on a regular basis.
29. **Regarding your "core" Wardrobe, have fun layering pieces in winter.** But don't get carried away. Too much layering will add too much bulk.
30. **Use your accessories to refresh an outfit.** Experiment with scarves, vests, jewelry and more to change the look. You might have worn the same blouse, skirt and blazer but slightly changed it up this week with a different color pump, accessories and purse.
31. **Speaking of shoes, maximize your shoe wardrobe.** Colorful shoes brighten an outfit, totally change the look of the same mixed and matched outfit and can even bring out the accessories more. So, don't be afraid to go with bold colors to spice up an outfit. But, make sure you have your neutral colored shoes as well to ensure flexibility.
32. **When accessorizing, don't overdo it.** Usually one key accessory is enough with other additions serving a supporting role.
33. **Look confident!** Add to your wardrobe by being confident. Throw those shoulders back and walk with a smile. You are core to making your "core" wardrobe look fabulous!



My book, *Fresh Air*, represents the country life and highlights in some of its tips how to enjoy denim and cotton.