

1940s Day Dressing Guide

VARIATIONS OF MALE & FEMALE CLOTHING, SHOES, HAIR &
MAKE UP

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Overall tips:

1. **Comfort trumps everything else!**
2. Bring other clothes just in case. It's September, you may get hot or you may experience a wardrobe malfunction, so it never hurts to have a backup just in case.
3. You may select clothing from either of the 1940s fashion binary options as is your preference. As Ashley Cook, owner of Casablanca Vintage, says, "The fashion is binary; the people may not be."
4. You don't have to fully dress up. You can do a version of "1940s Bounding."
 - a. Take the general tips from the makeup, hair, and accessories and incorporate them where you can into your uniform.
 - b. Feminine example: doing a 1940s hairstyle and makeup look and wearing skirt or slacks and shoes that look like they could be worn in the period.
 - c. Masculine example: doing a 1940s hairstyle and wearing pants and shoes that look more 1940s inspired.



Feminine:

Clothing:



Day Dresses

- Often knee length A-line skirt with the top portion a button up style top with sleeves, usually nipped in at the waist.
- Usually paired with a matching belt.

Separates

- Blouses in the 1940s usually featured puffy sleeves with a tight cuff at the wrist, button-up fronts, and collared at the neck. They almost always were worn tucked in.
 - For the bottoms, skirts or pants were worn.
- Skirts during the war weren't as full due to fabric rationing during the war but they still flared out a bit and ended below the knee.
 - Post-war, pleats were back in full force thanks to Dior's New Look, a full A-line shape added more swish to the bottom of the skirt.

- The colors of skirts ranged from blues and greens to reds and yellows. Patterns, especially stripes and plaids, were also common.
- Pre-1940s pants weren't common in daily wear, but with women entering the work force in full force pants became a necessity.
- Women's slacks had a similar shape to men's, wide legs, pressed with a front crease, but were more cinched at the waist for more definition.
- Colors for pants tended to be in blacks, blues, greens, tans, and browns, but later in the 40s more patterns such as plaids and stripes came into fashion.

Working Women

- When women started entering the factory workforce, they wore what was originally men's clothing that had been modified to fit them.
- The now famous Rosie the Riveter coveralls were common.
- Denim or twill pants and a tucked in blouse are also common in factory work.



Resources for clothing:

- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-ladies-workwear-clothes/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-blouses-shirts-tops/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-womens-dress-fashions/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/womens-1940s-pants-styles/>
- https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-skirts/#Post_Wartime_1940s_Skirts
- <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1940-1949/>

Shoes:

- Women often wore a chunkier block heel, usually 2-3 inches tall.
- The laced Oxford style heel was common for day wear and could be worn with most anything, but also available in a flatter style.
- Pantyhose was hard to find during the war because Nylon was rationed, so women would get friends to help them draw a "seam" up the backs of their legs and use household products to dye their legs to give the appearance of wearing them. Post-war years they came back in full force as a must-have accessory.
- When women started working in the factories during wartime, they were wearing more loafer style flatter shoe.
- Women also could wear a simple canvas shoe, like a modern pair of Keds.

Accessories:

- During the war years leather belts weren't being made as leather was needed for soldiers' boots. Dresses often came with a matching fabric belt, but black fabric ones were also very common as they could match multiple outfits.
- Gloves during the 40s were often made of soft fabrics in neutral, easy-to-maintain colors like black, brown, white, navy, and tan. Some women would purchase longer opera length gloves and push them down to give a more ruched look which became more and more popular throughout the decade.
- Scarves were often worn on the head as both an accessory and a way to keep hair out of the face. They were often in bright colors and patterns. Post-war scarves grew longer and were worn around the neck.
- Handbags became more and more popular as women were doing more during their days and working more outside the home. Purses grew in size to accommodate the need to carry more things, ones that could be slung over the shoulder were more popular. Colors were usually neutrals, although some brighter bags were common especially if they matched other accessories like gloves and belts.



Resources:

- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/10-popular-1940s-shoes-styles/>
- <https://www.vintage-retro.com/1940s-fashion-guide-to-1940s-womens-accessories/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-accessories-belts-gloves-head-scarf/>

Makeup:

Face:

- The goal was clear, glowing skin.
- Foundation to match skin, some light contouring to shape the face if desired.

Lips:

- Red lipstick was worn often during the 1940s, during the war it was seen as patriotic, and was still just as popular post-war.

Eyes:

- Brows were filled in, having either a round or arched shape was common.





- Eyeliner was becoming more popular, and post-war extended to create a more almond shape.
- Eyeshadow wasn't always worn, but when it was colors varied. During the war was usually in more natural shades, but post-war greens, blues, purples, golds, and silvers became more common. It was applied more evenly across the eyelid and up toward the brow, but not winged out much past the eyelashes. Usually, people only wore one color of eyeshadow.
- Mascara came in black, browns, and blue.

Nails:

- Generally, the goal was to match lip, cheek, and nail color (usually shades of red).

Resources for makeup:

- <https://hair-and-makeup-artist.com/womens-1940s-makeup/>
- <https://vintagemakeupguide.com/1940s-look/>

Hair:

- Curls, curls, curls!
- Hair was always styled nicely, there was no “messy bun” look of the time.
- Victory Rolls were very popular! Since it is difficult to achieve for an everyday style, it was worn most often on days you could get to the salon to get them done.
- When working in factories during the



1940s, they had their hair pulled back in a few different ways; a low bun at the nape, tied back with a scarf or a snood, or the popular victory rolls.

Resources:

- <https://www.wikihow.com/Do-Victory-Rolls>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-hairstyles-history-womens-hairstyles/>
- <https://verityvintagestudio.typepad.com/my-blog/2016/03/1940s-hairstyles-in-general.html>

Masculine:

Clothing



Suits

- Still everyday wear
 - The colors were usually blacks, blues, browns, and greys, but warmer tones were popular in warmer months.
 - Vests were considered a waste of fabric, both during the war years and after.
 - Suit pants were wider legged and pressed with a front crease and were more often worn higher on the waist.
 - Cuffs on the bottom were common, men got around the fabric rationing by buying longer pants and cuffing them themselves.
- Dress shirts were often colorful in tones of blue, grey, green, tan, or yellow, but white was also worn. They were also worn tucked in.

Casual/Sport Clothing

- Post war knit shirts, sweater vests, & pullovers were very common after the workday was over.
- Still worn with slacks, colors in blues, greens, tans, and greys.

Working Class

- If you didn't wear a suit to work, it was common to wear trousers and a work shirt in matching colors. Material varied but was usually sturdy.
- Work shirts were still collared and buttoned up, but also often had 2 pockets and larger armholes for more freedom of movement.
- Sturdy coveralls were worn by men working in jobs that were too dirty for other clothing, such as mechanics or working on farms. They were all one piece, often with long sleeves, and all one color, usually blues, greens, and greys.



Hawaiian Shirts:

- Hawaiian shirts came into popularity during the 1930s, a popularity that continued through past the 1940s.

- Based on pictures from the time, Hawaiian shirts were most often worn with khaki-colored pants, casual loafer style shoes, and sometimes a white undershirt.

Neckwear

- Ties were often worn short to 2 inches above the belt and were much wider than they are today. They were also patterned in geometrics, curvy lines, and art deco styles. Patterns of the wearer's hobbies such as fishing or painting were common.
- Ties matching both the pants, and the shirt were worn as well in public settings for the working class.
- Cravats, scarves, and bowties could also be worn.

Shoes

- Lace-up Oxford or Derby shoes were the most common in browns and blacks.
- Loafers were also common.
- The shoes shape was more rounded, like a 1930s shoe. With leather being rationed, new shoes were hard to get so most shoes were still from the previous decade.
- A more casual shoe very similar to Converse today also common (black or white).
- Socks were worn taller, mid-calf usually, and were a variety of colors and patterns.

Accessories:

- Suspenders, with leather loops not metal clips, could be worn with bold colors, wide stripes, or geometric patterns.
- Cufflinks could reflect one's hobbies, patriotism, or complement a shirt.
- Wrist watches would match the color of the cufflinks. Or one could wear a pocket watch in their waistcoat.
- Lapel pins were an easy way to show hobbies, interests, and patriotism.
- Eyeglasses started to have more rectangular, square, or triangular shapes versus the round wire glasses of the 1930s.
- Sunglasses, especially aviators, started gaining in popularity in the 1940s too.
- Hats completed the outfit! The hats were traditionally fedoras but could be a top hat or "pork pie hat", when wearing a suit. A newsboy style cap could be worn with a more casual look.



Hair

- Much like women, men were expected to have well-kept hair with frequent visits to the barber.

- Hair was kept short on the sides and back and longer on top. It would either be smoothed straight back with pomade or parted and swept to the side.
- Early 40s men's styles leaned straighter and flatter whereas later 40s styles were more waved and had more volume.
- Naturally curly hair would still be parted and swept to the side.
- Facial hair was generally worn or kept to a thin mustache. Post war men started allowing facial hair, from handlebar mustaches to full beards, to grow.

Resources:

- https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-mens-fashion/#1940s_Mens_Suits
- <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1940-1949/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1940s/1940s-mens-hairstyles-facial-hair/>