

# Suggestions for Wasteland Costuming for those starting up an outfit

By Killbuck Norman

Thanks for taking time to check this out. Allow me to begin by saying these are suggestions. Take them or leave them. From my experience taking it slow in developing your costume is always a good way to go. You will avoid expensive mistakes. I know, I've done that. Look through examples seen on the WW webpage, on Pinterest and other sites. But don't get carried away! That happens easy. By the time your first WW or post apo event is over, you'll find yourself completely rethinking what you assumed beforehand. Perhaps wait to develop much of a character or backstory for the same reason.

To get started, think **simple, practical and probable** for the base of your first outfit. Be sure it is comfortable head to foot. Read that last sentence again.

First, let's start by this extract from the Wasteland Weekend Theme Guide. Items in ( KN ) are my notes:

The primary influence at Wasteland is and always has been the Mad Max movies. Most of the costumes featured in the last three films (Road Warrior, Thunderdome, and Fury Road) would fit in fine at our event. (Not much of the first film from 1979...

*(A not yet post apoc world but on its edge KN).*

...so only the MFP police uniforms, some of Toe Cutter's gang and some of the vehicles would really fit our theme. And even the MFP uniforms should ideally be dirtied up or distressed to fit in our world).

The Mad Max films present a GROUNDED but simultaneously outlandish vision of the end of the world. We see mohawks, studded leather, sports equipment and supercharged gas-guzzling custom cars, **but we don't see cyborgs, aliens, magic, or high levels of technological advancement.** And while the Mad Max films have formed the core of our theme since year one we have always made room for other parts of the genre, so long as they don't stray away from the more reality-based vision presented by that Mad Max films.

*(Key points there. KN).*

Now time for some examples of that "futuristic" technology to stay away from. Keep in mind that "futuristic", includes technology that we have today but that is not generally available or just plain doesn't fit the vision. So, while exoskeletons and cybernetic enhancements *are* out there in the world right now, they're not something the average citizen has access to and they would not look correct at our event.

*(Rayguns? Particle Pulse Rifles? Fine for cosplay sci fi or cyberpunk but decidedly out of theme for WW. KN).*

(It should go without saying that medically necessary prosthetics will never be disallowed and are exempt from the theming requirements). "What about Furiosa's mechanical arm", you say?

Look at it. It's actually pretty low tech. It's a cobbled together prosthetic made from wrenches and gears, not a cyborg arm.

Also, and we hope we're not destroying any fantasies here, but zombies and mutants are not real.

*(I'm shocked, simply shocked. KN)*

Therefore, zombie and mutant costumes are not welcome at the event. However, radiation burns and radiation sickness ARE real, so you certainly could lean toward that type of look if you're so inclined (but be sure to consider the harsh climate of the Mojave before you start putting on prosthetic makeup...)

Please **do** read the whole theme guide, as it will help you focus ideas:

<https://www.wastelandweekend.com/about/theme/>

### **Part 1: Just the Basics**

I'll be referring to these in general terms for men and women. What would be a good comfortable basis for an outfit? Things readily available, durable and practical. T Shirts would be everywhere in the post apo world. I'd avoid commercial logo shirts. Button front shirts, pullovers, jackets, trousers, shorts, skirts would all be readily available.

A few words about color. Pick basics with drab colors. Browns, greys, black, olive, tan etc. This makes no real sense because in a post apo world, colorful clothing would not all mysteriously vanish leaving the drabby bits behind. Rather, the drabber shades fit better into the filthy esthetic themes for WW. Bright colors tend to stick out and are therefore discouraged. Wastelanders love their dank filth! This is why blue jeans are to be avoided. Yes, I know; in a post apo world jeans would be among the most abundant clothes left over. It's the color buckaroos. If the blue of the jeans is obscured through distress, and a combo of heavy fade and staining along with a patchwork repairs- well that may be worthy of admiration. We will address the issue of distress in part 2.

Most people wear belts, usually to carry a few necessities in a utility belt fashion. Wide belts are more practical for this. Military pistol belts are very popular, but any wide plain belt will do.

Footwear. Heavy duty shoes or boots are the best choice. Be sure they are very comfortable. Boots at WW often seem as though they are a full fashion statement in themselves with swags of chains, Frankenstein platforms, rows of studs, multitudes of straps and buckles. That's great, but not necessary. Well scuffed or distressed fit in perfectly.

Headwear. General protection from the sun is very important out in the Mojave. You'll see many people wearing simple ball caps, broad brimmed hats et al, all wonderfully mangled, dirtied and distressed. I'll address helmets later. Choose a comfortable cap or hat.

Apart from basic clothing, you'll need something to carry about your personal effects. A belt bag, large ammo pouch, a shoulder bag or small knapsack. Get yourself some goggles. Nice looking old surplus goggles are easy to obtain. I recommend clear lenses. Dark lenses are useless in a night dust storm. On the subject, a large soft scarf will be useful in a dust storm. I'll discuss respirators and dust masks later.

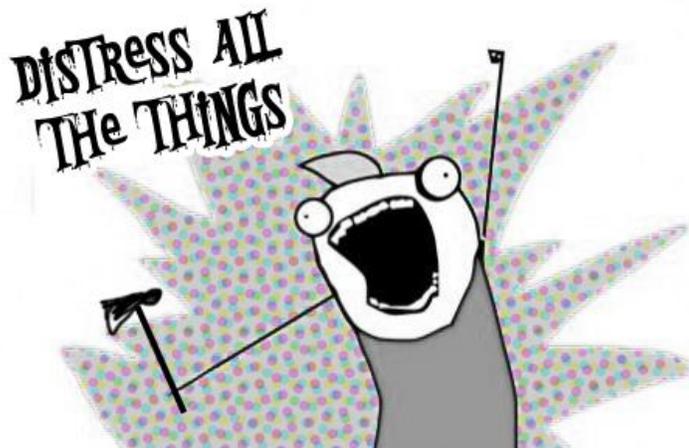


**A shoulder bag made from a pair of pants. A small belt bag and water canteen.**

You'll be wandering around quite a bit and should have a water bottle or canteen, and while you are at it choose a sturdy large cup to tie on your kit. Things to drink have a way of being offered.

If you are unfamiliar with the Mojave Desert, it's good to know that nights can get chilly- even freeze yer ass off cold. A warm jacket for the evening will be needed. You could also fashion a poncho made from and old blanket.

Using these parts for your basics it's time to waste the carp out of it all!!!



## Part 2. Distress All the Things!!!!

Distressing comes in three basic forms: --Dirt and stains, --Damage and Wear, --Repairs and make do adaptations

On the WW fb pages- Wasteland basic Training and the unofficial Wasteland Craftmasters and Makers, you can use the search function to find numerous ideas for distressing clothing and absolutely everything else. Be sure to look around in those.

Dirt and stains have many recipes including actual dirt. What you are looking for is a dingy, dirty look and is usually achieved with dyes or washes using acrylic craft paints like Apple Barrel. Burnt Umber, black and Chestnut brown are good go-to colors. Mix burnt umber and chestnut brown in equal parts with water to make a watery stain. Mix it until no blobs of paint remain. The more paint the deeper the color. Go for a fairly light stain at first. If you add black- use sparingly. Get the garment wet and wring it out hard. Lay it into the stain and squeeze it around until the garment has been fully interacted with the stain.. Wring it out and hang out to dry. You can also lay out the damp garment on a flat surface covered with a plastic trash bag, and apply more deeper stain to areas like around collars, cuffs and a few random areas. This application can be done with a medium size paintbrush and will bleed around in the damp fabric. After it dries, you can reapply if desired.



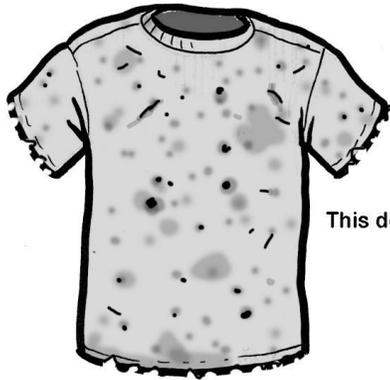
Many Wastelanders use spray paints as part of distressing. This works fine if you do so lightly, or it'll make the fabric stiff. Flat black or loamy browns add a nice greasy look. Tans add a dusty finish. Again, use sparingly.

Another option is commercial fabric dye. You'll find this challenging because "brown" ends up pinkish brown and black ends up looking kinda blue. Urg. If you use brown or tan you will have to add yellow and test of fabric samples until the pink shade is turned more to a dirt shade. If you want to make your

clothes look rusty (some do), there are tutorials for that. Does fabric rust? A stain here and there, sure. You can choose. Dark fabrics can be faded with bleach or color remover, then stains applied as needed or desired.

Doing the damage and wear is the fun part. But before going to town on those pants with a rasp file, consider where to put the damage. The illustrations that follow visualizes this.

## General suggestions for distressing a garment- shirts and coats.



This does not look natural.

Distributing holes, tears and stains evenly across the garment looks odd - too much like a pattern and not like natural wear and tear. Try to avoid this.

Think about this:

The shaded areas show where an upper garment will get the most wear and tear over time. Concentrate your efforts in distressing and staining in these areas.



This looks more natural.

Work on the shoulders, ends of sleeves, along the bottom as well as the collar and down the front.

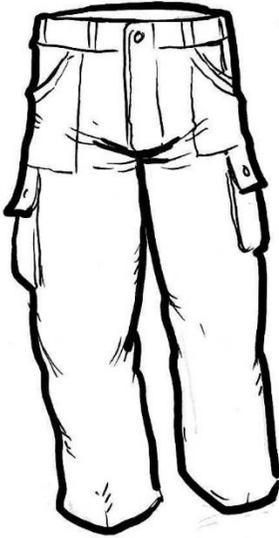
Vary the size of holes and tears to prevent a pattern-like look. Try some fading too, not just stains. Fading mostly happens on the shoulders and chest areas.



These ideas apply to shirts, jackets and coats- as they all take wear and tear the same way.

# DISTRESSING A PAIR OF PANTS

## A BASIC PAIR OF CARGO PANTS



THIS APPLIES TO PANTS AND EVEN SHORTS AND SKIRTS. THE TRICK IS TO CONCENTRATE THE DISTRESSING WHERE IT NATURALLY OCCURS, RATHER THAN DOING IT EVENLY ACROSS THE GARMENT-- WHICH LOOKS UN- NATURAL.

THE GOAL IS TO PROVIDE A NICELY WASTED LOWER GARMENT AS PART OF A BASIC OUTFIT.

## AREAS SUBJECT TO WEAR AND DAMAGE



LIGHT WEAR AREAS AROUND AND ON POCKETS

MEDIUM WEAR AREAS INCLUDE THIGH AREAS AND CALVES AND BUTT AREA

IF YOU HAVE A VERY OLD AND WORN PAIR OF JEANS YOU SEE WHERE DAMAGE AND WEAR HAPPENS OVER TIME

HIGH WEAR AREAS LIKE CUFFS AND KNEES



## DYED, STAINED AND DISTRESSED

START BY DOING THE BASIC DYE WORK FIRST, THEN DISTRESS THE FABRIC WITH FILES, COURSE SANDPAPER, SERRATED TOOLS ETC. AGAIN IN THE AREAS OF MOST COMMON WEAR SHOWN ABOVE. PATCHES AND REPAIRS ARE ALWAYS GOOD ADDITIONS. ADD EXTRA STAINS HERE AND THERE.

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Tools for damaging include sandpapers, rasp files, foam rasps, serrated knives, hacksaw blades, etc. Some use hammers to get small holes and others even drag clothes behind cars. The folks on the block will think you are nuts. They will be right. Belt sanders work great too but wear heavy gloves and avoid jamming the cloth- it's risky. You have to back the area worked with a ball of rags.

Using a hand tool, a good way to work the fabric is to put a piece of heavy material on your knee then lay the garment atop. Pull tight over the knee then start working with your tools. Be patient and work those common wear areas.

A favorite tool of mine is a sweat knife- a kind of horse grooming tool. The tiny sharp teeth give great natural looing results. It works on fabric and leather too.



### Part 3. To Armor or Not to Armor, that is the question.



I'll offer a personal suggestion for your first outfit. Take it or leave it. Avoid armor until you have attended and can make a rational choice. Armor is the irresistible junk food of wasteland toggery. It's so darn cool and compelling. But again, I'd wait to actually examine nicely made armor outfits. Armor like shoulder pads et al can be uncomfortable, not to mention making entrance and egress from a portojohn something to choreograph. A similar note regarding helmets. Steel helmets are heavy and take a long time to get used to wearing. I wore a steel pot for six years in the US Army and got used to it in about five years. Plastic helmets, training helmets, helmet liners are more comfortable and easier to modify with wastey doo dads. But again, I'd wait, see what's out there and make a more informed choice.

#### **Part 4. What about the Weapons???? Weapons- ARRGGGH!!!!**

Weapons would be a logical accessory in a post apo world for personal defense. Weapons fall into two basic categories: Analogs like clubs, spears, lances, swords and other bladed weapons, and Firearms like pistols, rifles, shotguns, etc.

For a starter outfit, go simple. A club made from a baseball bat for example. Perhaps a simple spear or old manchette. The guide is not to make it sharp enough to injure. I love the phrase “Disney Sharp”. Bows and arrows are popular but check the event rules!!!!!! There is a range but check the event rules!!!!!! Gigantic heavy clubs look great with a Warcraft character but in real life and just clumsy, cumbersome and actually useless. But they are pretty good for fun.

NOTE: If travelling from overseas or otherwise over the US Border, be sure you can legally bring in your idea.

No real firearms are allowed in WW, and that includes working BB or Airsoft. They must be non-fire able. That being said, prop firearms range from pistols to 50 cal machine guns, and even bigger. You may want to wait until after your first WW to bring one or take some time and get one in barter or in Bartertown. Remember to avoid unexplained technology like ray guns, particle pulse rifles and the like. Use tech that is readily available today. Deactivated airsofts can be given the beat-up treatment- but this takes time and it’s easy to mess it up. There are good tutorials. Keep things simple and plausible.



Suggestion- keep weapons simple, easy to carry and plausible

#### **Part 5: Masks, Gas Masks and Respirators**

In a conceivable post apo world, breathing hazards might include irradiated dust, chemical or bio hazards in the environment pollution or other airborne hazards. The simplest protective is a scarf, bandana or a small face mask. We have had a lot of practice with these lately. Some make simple

masks out of light leather. Or you can purchase a commercial mask- the type used for paint and dust protection, then waste it up a bit.

Gas masks- you'll see a lot of them. Be careful with the old Soviet masks and their green filters because they contain asbestos. In fact nearly all old masks made before 1970 should be assumed to contain asbestos. If the filter is old or damaged, the particles can leak and be breathed in. It's a *fairly* low risk, but a risk none the less. For sure fire safety get a mask without a filter and make a faux filter out of a can. Later when you get some techniques under your belt, you might try making a gas mask out of reclaimed materials for that perfect wasteland look.



**On the left is a simple light leather face mask. On the right is a prop gas mask I made from a paintball mask with tea tins for filters.**



**Above is a common commercial dust and paint filter mask.**

**Easy to find; just dirty it up and it's a winner!**

Face masks that work for visual effect or as a piece of combat protection iare fun, but can easily look odd if not designed well. A Halloween skull mask will always look like a Halloween skull mask and be

recognized right away. Look around at good examples at WW and later decide if it's something to add to your outfit.



**I made this protective mask made from and old fencing mask and  
Part of a cycling helmet, aluminum egg poaching cups and leather thongs.**

### **Part 6: The Wrap up**

The objective for WW is to participate in a fully immersive environment depicting a post-apocalyptic world. To make this as effective as possible, everyone must be a participant and play a part. Our most important personal contribution is with our costume work. It's creative, fun and fascinating to plan and create a unique outfit that both fits and stands out at the same time.

It's hard to find guidance when you are new to it all. Where to start? Well, I hope these few pages have been somewhat useful. It's not comprehensive for certain but may help you along.

I'd like to end here where I started. These have been suggestions- take them or leave them. Plenty of folks have good advice and ideas. Mine are just mine. Perhaps my most important point is to start simple and basic and take your time. Look, listen and learn. Build skills and apply them. And have fun.



**Resources:**

Some Great Tutorials from Nuclear Snail Studios: <https://www.youtube.com/user/nuclearsnailstudios>

Some Mind-Blowing Stuff: <https://markcordory.com/salvaged-ware>

WW Theme: <https://www.wastelandweekend.com/about/theme/>

Some of my stuff if you are interested: <https://kostoomarts.weebly.com/new-wasteland-costumes-and-accessories.html>