



## When To Shop And Why

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Lacey Craig, 22, of Marion knows the basics. She shops after holidays. And she's not afraid to ask the clerk when her favorite pieces are going on sale.

Morganton's Mary Watson, 45, has the post-holiday rule down, too. But she knew she was making a shopping snafu Thursday when she dashed into Belk for a last-minute weekend outfit.

Tracey Farrell, 44, of Morganton keeps up with the sales by listening to the other women at work.

We've all got a little of the right idea about how to shop. Here are the essentials from the experts:

### When to shop and why

December, January

New in stores: Resort-wear, clothes in those not-quite-spring colors that will transition into the next season.

On sale: Gifts such as scarves, gloves and sweaters.

February, March

New in stores: Spring clothing

On sale: The winter stuff you can still get some wear out of.

April, May, June

New in stores: Summer attire.

On sale: Those early spring fashions that showed up when you were still too cold to wear them. You'll start to see markdowns on late spring styles in May and June.

On clearance: spring and summer merchandise at department stores and boutiques.

July, August, September

New in stores: School clothes and all the new fall stuff.

On sale: The summer stuff.

October, November

New in stores: Gift items such as cashmere sweaters and gloves. Also fall and winter fashions.

On sale: Fall and winter fashions.

On clearance: Winter clothing that stores have to get rid of by the end of the year.

Source: Michelle Sterling, personal shopper, Global Image Group, San Francisco, Calif.

Pointers from the pros

- It's not too late for an Easter dress

Sure, you missed the holiday but the pastels should be on sale, says Kim Slappy, a personal shopper with For The Love of Shopping in Detroit, Mich. Look for hats and purses in particular.

- Pick a color scheme and stick with it.

You gravitate toward the same colors anyway, say the experts. If you stick to a basic palette, you won't get home with a blue jacket that doesn't match any of your black pants. This is especially important if you're bargain shopping. It's not a good deal if you're not going to wear it.

BJ Wilson of the Texas wardrobe-consulting firm BJ Wilson & Company has these suggestions for your spring and summer scheme:

Navy blue and white (throw in accessories in red or yellow)

Black and white (your spot-color accessories work with this one, too)

Neutrals — such as bone, ivory and tan.

A palette from Michelle Sterling of Global Image Group:

White, khaki and pink.

- Last summer's fashions are still in style this year

The same goes for spring, fall and winter.

"Seasons overlap," promises Slappy. So you shouldn't be worried about the outlets that sell last year's clothes.

The fashion cycle lasts about seven years, Sterling says. Certain styles have their peaks but they probably won't fizzle out in a year's time. One example: city shorts. They were around last year. They're everywhere this season.

- Make a list

You couldn't go on a trip without some idea where you were going. It's just as easy to get lost in the fluorescent sheen of a department store.

Look in your closet and flip through fashion magazines to see what will work with what you already have, advises Sterling.

Wilson suggests separating your clothes by season and by fabric to get an idea about what you need. You don't want to pull out that spring-pink dress and realize the only shoes you can wear are heavy winter clogs.

- Ask when it's going on sale

Slappy gets to know the salespeople. She says they always know if that great pair of pumps will be marked down the next day or the following week. Don't be too shy to save some money.

Once you develop a relationship with clerks or even store owners, they'll realize you're a valuable customer and they won't mind giving you the scoop, Sterling says.