

# SIMPLE STYLE

## THE MAXI DRESS

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

For such a floaty, romantic garment, the maxi dress is remarkably practical. It covers your feet for one thing, so you can ditch the heels and comfortably scuff about in flats instead. It will also keep your legs warm on those summer evenings when the temperature turns unexpectedly chilly. And, unlike other skirt lengths, it does all this while maintaining a veneer of feminine elegance.

If there is a downside to the maxi dress, it's that there is more material to grapple with than with other hemlines. This can lead to undignified tumbles – another reason to avoid wearing heels with one is that they'll inevitably catch in the hem – or the dress will snag or get caught up in things. This can be overcome, however, by wearing a dress that is an inch or two above the floor, which also prevents a grubby hem trailing on the floor behind you.

Before the turn of the 20th century, of course, there was no choice of hemline: dresses and skirts had been full length for ever. They eventually rose in the 1920s when flappers bravely wore dresses that revealed their knees, and went as high as a skirt can go by the start of the 1960s.

They were back in vogue when Oscar de la Renta designed a maxi dress in the late



*“To avoid looking like a Stepford Wife, go for a maxi that reveals some flesh”*

60s, followed by Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Dior including full-length dresses at their Paris shows in 1970. After that, the maxi dress went mainstream. Many a 70s dinner party was graced by women wearing full-length floral prints and large hair.

When worn by San Fran hippies, however, the maxi took on a sexy, ethnic flavour, and was accessorised with wooden beads, chokers, a tangle of hair and dirty bare feet. In the suburbs, though, women favoured the full-on frilly Laura Ashley: a look that reached its apotheosis in *The Stepford Wives*, where the wives pushed trolleys around supermarkets in demure Victorian-style maxis – in marked contrast to Katherine Ross's character who moved into the neighbourhood wearing hot pants.

To avoid looking like a Stepford Wife or as though you've stepped out in your nightie by mistake, go for a maxi dress that reveals some flesh on your top half. Bare shoulders, arms, and a cleavage reveal prevent frumpiness. As will glittering jewellery choices. The maxi dress is your comfortable route to summer glamour, after all. **S**

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOPHAM

### THE UPDATE

#### THE CLASSIC



#### Shikoku Spaced Jersey maxi dress | £95

The floweriness of the print is offset by the black background. Nice and loose, too. [frenchconnection.com](http://frenchconnection.com)

#### TWO GREAT TWISTS



#### Blue silk viscose maxi dress | £110

Long, lean and elegant with a drop hem. A great dress for showing off lovely arms. [jigsaw-online.com](http://jigsaw-online.com)



#### Amoseli maxi dress | £48

One to pull on and head off to a festival in. Works well with a denim jacket and a wide-brimmed straw hat. [oasis-stores.com](http://oasis-stores.com)