How to Wear Stirrup Leggings in 2026: The Fashion Week Trend Returning from the 80s

Maria Cattini | 09/03/2026 | FASHION

Have you noticed how certain fashion pieces never truly disappear?

They vanish for a decade, maybe two. Then suddenly they return—slightly altered, unexpectedly elegant, and perfectly aligned with the mood of the moment.

That’s exactly what’s happening with **stirrup leggings**.

Once known as **fuseaux**, these slim trousers with a strap under the foot were everywhere in the 1980s and quietly survived through the minimalist 1990s. Now they are reappearing on runways with a new twist: designers are pairing them with tailoring, sculptural silhouettes, and sharp footwear.

Alongside them, **split leggings**—leggings with a subtle slit at the ankle—are emerging as one of the most interesting details of the season. The combination of nostalgia and experimentation is redefining how this simple garment fits into modern wardrobes.

The result? A piece once associated with sportswear is becoming unexpectedly refined.








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Why Are Stirrup Leggings Trending Again in 2026?

Fashion rarely moves forward in a straight line. Instead, it circles back—revisiting familiar shapes and translating them for a new cultural moment.

The return of stirrup leggings sits at the intersection of several influences.

First, the ongoing revival of **1980s silhouettes** continues to shape contemporary collections. Designers are rediscovering pieces that balance functionality and strong visual identity.

Second, the lingering aesthetic of **early-2010s Indie sleaze** has reintroduced a taste for slim silhouettes and slightly rebellious styling.

When these references collide, the result feels inevitable: leggings return as a core garment, yet designers elevate them with experimental details such as ankle slits and stirrup straps.

What once belonged to athletic wardrobes is now part of a more structured, fashion-driven silhouette.

How to Style Split Leggings for a Modern Look

Among the variations emerging on runways, **split leggings** may be the most versatile.

The slit at the ankle changes the visual relationship between the pant leg and the shoe. It opens slightly at the front or side, revealing more of the foot and creating a longer line along the leg.

Designers often pair them with pointed pumps or minimalist heels. The effect is subtle but powerful: the small opening transforms a simple legging into something closer to tailored trousers.

Oversized shirts have become a favorite pairing. The contrast between volume above and slim structure below produces a balanced silhouette that feels modern rather than nostalgic.

Some collections push the concept further by pairing sculptural blouses with stirrup leggings and low heels, creating a striking dialogue between softness and structure.

Which Designers Are Reinterpreting Stirrup Leggings?

Several designers have explored this silhouette in recent collections.

One example comes from **Marie-Adam Leenaerdt’s Fall/Winter 2026-2027 show**, where the focus centered on evolving forms and sculptural layering. Dramatic shirts were styled with slim stirrup leggings and understated heels, highlighting the tension between fluid fabrics and architectural shapes.

Meanwhile, **Stella McCartney** approached the stirrup detail through an equestrian lens. Her collection referenced stable life and the symbolic connection between movement, nature, and freedom—making the stirrup a subtle nod to riding culture.

Other brands have focused on the slit-ankle variation, often with a rebellious undertone inspired by **1990s fashion attitudes**.

These reinterpretations reveal how a minimal garment can carry strong cultural references.

Is the Stirrup Leggings Revival Truly Vintage?

The answer lies in how fashion treats archives.

Stirrup leggings belong to a lineage that stretches back decades, yet their current styling differs dramatically from earlier eras.

In the 1980s, fuseaux were frequently worn with oversized sweaters and sporty jackets. By the 1990s they had entered a more minimalist wardrobe: black leggings, simple knitwear, and ballet flats.

Today the garment moves somewhere between those worlds.

Designers combine the nostalgia of past decades with contemporary tailoring and experimental proportions. The result is a layered aesthetic—part retro, part futuristic.

That tension is what makes the revival compelling.

Smart Tip

If you want to try the **stirrup leggings trend** without completely reinventing your wardrobe, start with a simple formula.

Pair black stirrup leggings with classic **pointed pumps or minimalist loafers**. The strap under the foot creates a continuous line that instantly sharpens the look.

Small details can completely change the character of a basic outfit.

From Runway to Street Style

The most interesting part of any trend is how quickly it escapes the runway.

During recent Paris shows, stirrup leggings appeared frequently in street style. Fashion insiders balanced the sleek silhouette with oversized coats, structured blazers, or short dresses layered over leggings.

These combinations reveal why the garment works so well today.

It acts almost like a second skin—neutral enough to support dramatic pieces, yet distinctive enough to shape the silhouette.

In everyday wardrobes, the formula often looks like this:

- stirrup leggings with an oversized blazer
- split leggings paired with a long coat

- black leggings worn under a mini dress or tunic shirt

The garment remains simple. Styling gives it personality.

Can Leggings Really Look Elegant?

For years, leggings were confined to the realm of gym wear and casual dressing.

Recent collections challenge that assumption.

When combined with tailored jackets, sculptural shirts, or sharp footwear, leggings function more like structured hosiery than casual pants. They become the base layer that anchors an entire look.

In this context, elegance doesn’t come from the garment itself. It comes from the proportions around it.

That shift in perspective explains why designers are revisiting such a familiar piece.

A Classic Returns with a New Language

The real story behind the **stirrup leggings trend 2026** is not simply nostalgia.

It’s transformation.

A garment rooted in sportswear evolves into a refined styling tool. A tiny strap under the foot—or a subtle slit at the ankle—reshapes the silhouette and changes how clothing interacts with movement.

Fashion archives never remain static.

They wait for the right moment to be rewritten.

And in 2026, stirrup leggings have found theirs.

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