

FAMILY SPEND A YEAR



By
**AMANDA
REVELL WALTON**

THE wartime campaign to Make Do And Mend means little in today's throwaway society - but one family have decided to try living the thrifty lifestyle for a YEAR.

In that time Jen and Ben Gale and their two young sons have vowed not to buy anything new.

Instead, in keeping with the slogan, they will either mend what they already have, buy second-hand - or go without.

The obvious exception is food - and certain bathroom products - although plucky Jen reveals: "I have recently experimented with a homemade version of deodorant.

"At first I thought there was no way it would work, but it does.

"It's very easy to make from solid coconut oil, cornflour and bicarbonate of soda. Then you can add any essential oils you like to personalise the smell."

And 35-year-old Jen, mum to William, four, and one-year-old Samuel, adds: "We've also gone cold turkey on using baby wipes in an effort to save money.

"Instead I've made flannels from old towels cut into squares. I have a stash downstairs ready to wipe mucky hands and faces after eating. When we go out I take a damp flannel in a plastic bag."

Since the family started their challenge in September Jen has adopted increasingly creative ways of being self-sufficient, including teaching herself to sew, knit and crochet to clothe her family.

She says: "I've had varying degrees of success. The first crochet hat I made for Ben was a disaster but the second one I made for myself was much better."

She has also become a keen advocate of "upcycling" - taking an object you would otherwise bin and making it into something new.

Bottle

She says: "I love it. I remember my mum telling me how my nana used to unravel jumpers and wash the wool so she could knit something new. I did the same and made mittens and a scarf from an old woolly jumper.

"Ben and I have also made his sister a lamp from an empty wine bottle and some fairy lights - although we did get through at least two wine bottles trying to drill a hole in the base."

Jen, of Warminster, Wilts, has been writing a blog about her family's experiment. She says she first got the idea after Samuel was born.

She says: "I kept thinking that we actually had nearly everything we needed, and most of what we wanted. We didn't really need any more stuff.

"I felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of stuff in our house, in the shops, on the TV. It's all-pervading - this need for more and more stuff.

"It was even affecting the kids. William was constantly asking for things when we were in the shops. Worse still, he didn't even really care what it was - he just wanted more stuff.

"Everything in life seems to be based around buying and consuming. It's scary when you take a step back and see how materialistic we've become as a society.

"I was as guilty as the next person - sometimes I'd even put something I'd just bought into the cupboard and forget about it.

"So I started mulling the idea over for a while, wondering if we could stop buying new things for a year - and give our bank balance a much-needed break into the bargain."

She admits that hubby Ben, 37, who works for a car parts firm, took a little persuading to agree to the challenge.

Jen says: "I told him it would



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mean no newspapers, CDs, DVDs, no new clothes, no going to the sales - which he loves to do - and no new toys for the kids.

"At first he was quite hesitant but I just kept stressing that it didn't mean we couldn't have these things - just that we couldn't buy them new."

Eventually Ben came round and Jen says: "It has helped that he has always been good at DIY and fixing things, so he has ended up relishing this part of the challenge.

"I have to laugh every time I go to use our washing basket, though. He has now fixed it so many times it's held together with a variety of glues, gaffer tape and some great stuff called Sugru, which is a self-setting

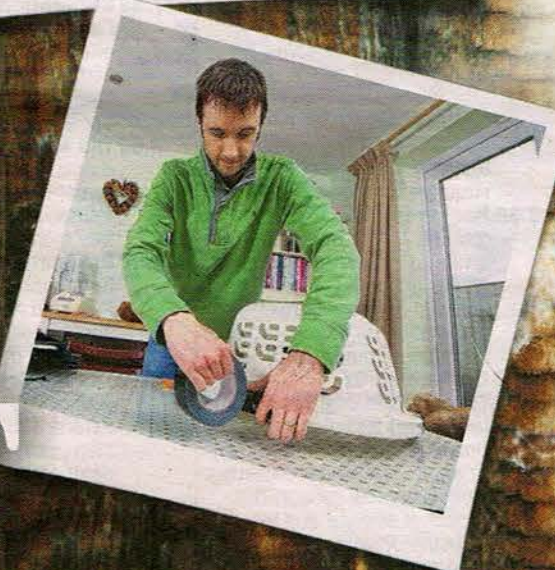
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FEAR ON 'MAKE DO AND MEND' LIFESTYLE

JEN'S TOP TIPS TO SAVE CASH

AS WELL as the savings they are making on food by wasting less, Jen says the family are about £150 a month better off thanks to their Make Do And Mend philosophy. In total, by the end of the year, she reckons they will have an extra £2,000 in the bank. Here are Jen's top 12 money-saving tips.

- 1 When your old jeans wear out, don't throw them away. Instead, turn them into a new skirt.
- 2 Cut up old towels to use as flannels instead of wasting expensive baby wipes on sticky hands and faces.
- 3 Whizz up any fruit that is past its best into a delicious smoothie.
- 4 Turn an old vest top into a simple shopping bag by sewing up the bottom - you'll never need a plastic one again.
- 5 Next time you treat yourself to a night out at the cinema, take home-made popcorn and save yourself a fiver.
- 6 If you've shrunk a jumper in the wash, save it to make hats in the winter.
- 7 If you have small children, learning how to sew on a simple patch could save you a small fortune in new trousers.
- 8 Plan your meals in advance for the week ahead so you know exactly what you need - and make sure you use up any leftovers.
- 9 Raid your recycling box for "toys" for the kids. Cardboard boxes can have a multitude of uses with a bit of imagination.
- 10 Check out websites such as Freecycle and Freegle to see what you can pick up for nothing.
- 11 Save your old envelopes to use again.
- 12 Cut the fronts off old Christmas and birthday cards and use them as notelets.



TO MENDER... From above, Jen and Ben at work at the home, Ben in a home-made fire engine Christmas present and the washing basket self-crocheted hat

DON'T BUY ANYTHING NEW EVEN MAKE DEODORANT

er." On the whole, Jen says, the haven't really done without thing - they just have to think creatively about how they get things they want. Jen says: "We're now regulars at boot sales, flea markets, vintage and charity shops. We use eBay as well. We've also got into Freecycle, which is a kind of swap-shop site which matches people who have things they want to get rid of with people who can use them. It's a great way of keeping things out of landfill and also getting stuff for free." Though the couple have had to buy new parts for their car, they've opted for reconditioned prod-

ucts whenever possible. However, Jen admits she has drawn the line at buying second-hand underwear. She says: "Maybe I'm just a bit old fashioned, but the thought of someone else's pre-used smalls makes me shudder." The family found that Christmas was the hardest time for sticking to their commitment. **Gadgets** Jen says: "The whole festive period was quite hard, but actually it was also nice to put more effort into making something that people would like. It made the presents a lot more personal. "There have obviously been times when it's been difficult, especially

with two young boys, but I don't think the children are that bothered. "They're only young so it's a lot easier than if they were teenagers wanting the latest gadgets." Jen has calculated that the family have so far saved at least £1,000 by their alternative way of living. She says: "We probably spent a maximum of £50 at Christmas and our credit card bill has come right down, so there's no denying that making do and mending is good for the bank balance. "But I've also learned to become more practical, learned skills such as sewing and knitting, and become quite creative. It's actually been really good fun too." Ben says: "When Jen first started

to talk about the idea of a whole year of not buying anything new I'll admit I was sceptical - and a little concerned I'd have to do without stuff I wanted. "It's been a challenge finding decent second-hand clothes in the local charity shop, as the styles in there are generally more suitable for a 77-year-old than a 37-year-old. "But I love the fact that I've earned myself the title of Daddy Fix It - and now have enough glues, tapes and adhesives to hold a convention." ● To follow Jen and Ben's progress visit mymakedoandmendyear.wordpress.com, which has been shortlisted for the BritMums website's Brilliance In Blogging awards in the commentary category.