

SEEKING A SIMPLER LIFE

Make room for things which you truly treasure and learn to live without all the other stuff

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Photography: EmmaRossa



Living simply and living green tend to go hand in hand - both encourage us to be conscious consumers.

For many of us, a slower, simpler lifestyle might feel out of reach as we negotiate our busy lives, but a simpler way of life is not as unattainable as it might seem.

Whether motivated by stress from overwork, illness or concern for our planet, a growing number of women are re-evaluating how they spend their time, money and energy. And by sharing their stories on Instagram, they are inspiring us to do the same.

"I was trapped in a life that demanded too much of me," says Yorkshire-based Jen Chillingworth, author of *Live Green: 52 Steps For a More Sustainable Life* (Quadrille, £8.99). "Juggling a stressful management job with looking after my young son, I felt like I was failing at everything. Each morning, I'd hustle my son into nursery before spending an hour

on a tough commute to work. I went from meeting to meeting, dealing with difficult situations, until returning to collect my son. Weekends were spent frantically trying to catch up with everything.

"My way of coping was to buy 'treats' to cheer myself up: wine, DVDs, cushions and clothes that I never removed the labels from," she says. "My home groaned with things and my husband and I fought a lot about money which put a strain on our relationship. This way of life seemed to be normal for so many, yet I knew deep down that I was unhappy and wanted something different."

When a close relative passed away, Jen was prompted to make some serious changes. "My husband and I planned how I could leave my stressful job and find a healthier work-life balance," she says. "I landed a part-time



Jen Chillingsworth
A freelance writer and photographer from Leeds, Jen's love of plants, flowers and nature led her to a simpler life. She shares practical tips and ideas on living with intention at little-birdie.com and on Instagram @jenlittlebirdie

role in a market garden. Being outdoors, observing the seasons and learning how to work the land helped me on the path to a slower and simpler way of life."

According to Duane Elgin, author of *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich* (William Morrow, £9.99), those seeking a simpler life tend to lower their level of consumption, reduce undue clutter and complexity, feel an intimate connection with the earth and invest the time freed up to spend with their partner, children and friends. This is exactly what Jen did. With a lower-stress job, she no longer felt the need to reward herself with 'treats'. Now, when she does get the urge to spend, she lets

Simple living offers more time to make sustainable, natural choices at home.



Courtney's Project 333, challenging us to wear just 33 items for three months, showed the ease with which we could all live simpler lives.

things sit on a secret Pinterest board for two weeks first. "I've removed lots of unnecessary things from my life this way," she says.

"Simple living," she explains, "is about understanding what's important to you and letting go of what isn't. For me, the important things are my family, our health and the environment – they're at the core of every decision I make.

"As a family, we now regularly discuss our values and how they align with our day-to-day living. From meal planning, budgeting and time offline to taking a holiday, these are all things we do with intention," she says. "I hate to think where we might have ended up if we hadn't made changes. Slow and simple living has made us a much stronger family unit."

While it was the death of a loved one that spurred Jen on to change her lifestyle, for US-based Courtney Carver, change was prompted by a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. "I learned how damaging stress is on our bodies, brains and hearts and set out to eliminate as much stress from my life as possible," she says.

Courtney bought less stuff, was able to downsize, cleared her debt and eventually quit her high-powered job. She charted her journey on her blog (bemorewithless.com) and in her book *Soulful Simplicity: How Living With Less Can Lead to So Much More* (Tarcher Perigee, £9.99). In both, she talks about busy boycotting, the art of no-ing and having fewer ends to make meet.

She also challenged herself to live with a wardrobe of 33 items for 3 months (known as Project 333) and thousands of followers did the same. Having less in your wardrobe will, she says "reduce decision fatigue, save you time, money and space and help you redefine your relationship with stuff.

"Once you enjoy the benefits of dressing with less, you'll get curious about living with less," she says. "Once I realised how little I needed in the closet, I wondered what else



was holding me back. Did I really need all those spatulas and wire whisks?"

Learning to live with less stuff not only reduces the amount of time you need to spend earning the money to buy it, but also cuts out time spent cleaning, storing and organising it. Simple living isn't just about clearing your clutter though: it's about resisting the urge to fill every moment too.

"We are human beings, not human doings," says Emma Ross (mamalina.co), mum to two small children with a third on the way. Caring for the planet is a top priority for Emma and she uses her blog to make low waste, plastic-free parenting accessible, offering tips on everything from re-usable nappies to DIY cloth wipes, chemical-free cleaners and how to live sustainably in general.

Nevertheless, full-time work, motherhood and updating her blog left Emma feeling exhausted and "wanting to order a takeaway every single night". She went from working

five to four to three days a week, and then eventually quit her prestigious job after one too many rushed mornings. "I knew I needed more headspace and that I wanted to be with the kids," she says, "so we decided to make the sacrifices necessary for that to happen."

Emma had been documenting her days off and found mums were interested in the simple ways in which she filled them, such as shopping locally and hanging out at home not doing much. Once she quit her job, she was able to devote more time to her children and have more of those 'zero-plans days' too.

"Stress levels radically reduce when you have less plans," she says. "When you're racing to get out of the house quickly, you automatically get tetchy with the kids. But when you have no plans, there's no pressure, no expectations and no time we have to stick to. If we want to take an hour to put the kids' shoes on, that's fine. We wander out and just see where we go. It's always those days that are the loveliest."

Because "adult's work can be child's play," she feels no need to go to playgroups, while acknowledging they can be a lifeline for



Courtney Carver
For Courtney, embarking on a simpler life meant gaining the space and time she needed to reconnect with herself. Learn how she eliminates overwhelm at bemorewithless.com and follow her on Instagram @bemorewithless



After downsizing her wardrobe, Courtney was inspired to live with less in the rest of her home too.



Emma Ross
Londoner Emma set up her simple living blog (mamalina.co) to inspire and share her ideas about living and parenting slowly and sustainably with "a big dose of yoga, cooking and travel". You can also find her on Insta @mamalinauk

many mums. "Children don't necessarily know that putting a wash on is like a chore. For them, it's fun," she says. "There's a pressure to be busy and a fear that kids will get bored if they're not stimulated all the time. But I'm convinced that my kids learn just as much by helping me around the house, watering the plants and weighing bananas."

Not everyone who craves a simpler life is seeking a greener one, but they tend to go hand in hand. "Parenting in a low waste, sustainable way requires a slight re-jig of how you choose to spend your time," adds Emma. "If I was running around, I might not have the

extra minute or two that's needed to sort out and change a re-usable nappy."

"When you stop buying things that you don't need, it is better for the planet," agrees Jen. "It's not feasible for everyone to grow their own veg or cook meals from scratch every day," she goes on to explain, "but there are lots of simple changes that we can all make."

"We can switch to bars of soap rather than bottles of handwash which will both reduce packaging and save money, open a window instead of using an air-polluting air freshener, borrow things rather than buy them or use up our leftovers before we head out to go shopping."

"People often believe simple living is about moving to the countryside, keeping chickens and baking a fresh loaf of sourdough every day," she adds. "But we live in a city and it's easier in some ways as we have access to markets, refill stores, bookshops and public green spaces."

Of course we won't all want, or be able, to quit our job, downsize or purge our possessions - and that's ok. Simple living is about working out what matters to us as individuals and making space for it by getting rid of the stuff that doesn't. Whether that space appears by clearing our wardrobe, our cutlery drawer or by being selective about how we fill our days is totally up to us. 🍃

Straight forward steps towards simple living

- * Ask yourself: 'How do I want to live my life?', 'What changes do I need to make for this to happen?' or 'How do I want to leave this world behind for my children?'. The answers to these big questions can help us determine what our core values are and can be the basis behind every decision we make', says Jen.
- * Courtney advises cutting back on admin. 'Open your in-box one to three times a day. If the first thing you do in the morning is check e-mail, you may never have a chance to decide what's most important to you.'
- * If you have small children, involve them in some of the regular household chores so your actual downtime (when they sleep) is yours', adds Emma.
- * 'Don't say yes when your heart says no' says Courtney. 'Be grateful for the invitation, be respectful of the time and courage it may have taken someone to ask, and graceful and loving when you decline.'
- * Emma is a big advocate of 'zero plans days' when you can just see where life takes you - they're something we can all make time for. 'Go with the flow, walk round the block and see what happens.'
- * Jen says the key to reducing the amount of needless shopping she does is keeping a secret Pinterest board stocked with all the things she's tempted to buy. 'Leave things you want on the board for a couple of weeks before buying anything. You may find you don't want them after all.'

"I'm convinced my kids learn just as much by helping me around the house"

