

Happy Thrift-mas!

These queens of thrift, first featured in Prima's August issue, get maximum fun at minimal cost – and skip the season's financial hangover

'Buy presents for less'

MARGOT BLOOM, 42, is a lifestyle coach from Croydon, Surrey

'In the run-up to Christmas, charity shops start putting out last year's unwanted gifts that are still boxed. This is a great way to pick up token gifts and stocking fillers.

'If you're entertaining and someone asks if they can bring something, always say yes. If guests don't offer to help, suggest it. Christmas is not about one person running around after everyone else.'

'LEARN FROM JAPAN'

KARYN FLEETING, 34, from Ripon, North Yorkshire, runs a PR company and writes www.miss-thrifty.co.uk

'List what you need for your Christmas menu in advance, check prices online and start picking up non-perishable items. Plan the meal to fit your budget, rather than the other way round, outsourcing some dishes to guests, if necessary. I'm a fan of furoshiki, the Japanese method of gift wrapping with fabric. If you have a stash of off-cuts, you have a source of cheap wrapping. It requires a little practice, so watch the demonstration videos on YouTube, and get folding.'



'SAVE UP OLD BOTTLES'

JO FINBURGH, 40, from London, is a Friends of the Earth fundraiser

'I always send Friends of the Earth e-cards because they save on paper, they're free – and the photos are beautiful (visit www.foe.co.uk/living/cards.html).

'One year, I made decorations from an old shirt and a piece of silk from a charity shop. I also ask colleagues to save nice oil bottles. Then I buy a 5l can of olive oil and fill the bottles with oil, herbs, peppercorns, lemon, chilli and garlic. Also – save used wrapping paper, iron it on a low heat and it comes out pristine!'



'GIVE HOMEMADE HAMPERS'

LUCY PATTERSON, 36, from Eye, Suffolk, runs a company matching nannies to families

'I make hampers, filling a covered shoe box with jam, chutney (using fruit and veg I've grown or foraged), cakes, walnuts (again, collected locally), homemade vanilla vodka or sloe gin and gingerbread houses, and wrap them in cellophane bought on eBay. For kids, I design vouchers for things such as a pyjama party at my house, or an afternoon baking (plus licking the bowl!).'



* Cut the cost



‘THRIFTY GIFTS CAN STILL BE THOUGHTFUL’

GILL CURWEN, 40, from Carlisle, runs her own craft business, Babble and Jojo

‘Last year, I spent under £100 on presents for the entire family of at least ten. My husband’s present was a wonderful book on the history of Rome – a city he is desperate to visit. I got it in Oxfam in immaculate condition. At car-boot sales, you can find other people’s unwanted gifts that have never been used.’



‘Budget all year round’

HELEN CALEY, 44, an education support officer, lives on the Isle of Man

‘I try and plan in advance, putting away £50 a month in a separate bank account and looking out for food and drink offers from September onwards. We store or freeze it or, if it’s too tempting, give it to my mum to look after!’

‘My daughter and I make edible gifts, such as biscuits and chutneys, for friends. Throughout the year, I collect old jars and lengths of ribbon, so we can package them beautifully.’

‘And, of course, I get back out in the January sales and buy cards, wrapping paper and gifts, ready for when Christmas rolls around again.’



‘GET THE CHILDREN INVOLVED’



DENYSE MCGAHY, 43, from Guernsey, is a mum to six children and stepchildren

‘Throughout the year, I try to find treats on special offer and squirrel away one item a week from my shopping under the stairs.’

‘We keep our Christmas cards from the previous year and, at the beginning of December, my children cut them up into gift tags for this year’s presents. Each year, they colour in pictures of angels, adding to our collection, which gets hung on the walls. Last year, our garden centre let us have a damaged tree for free which, once decorated, looked lovely.’

‘It’s about experiences, not money’



BECKY GODDARD-HILL, 40, from Nottingham, blogs at www.babybudgeting.co.uk

‘Things like singing carols and leaving carrots for Rudolph make Christmas magical and take the emphasis off gifts. Why not declare a present amnesty with your kids’ friends’ parents? They’ll no doubt be relieved. Homemade decorations look great. I pop some water in a bowl with a cup in the middle, fill the bowl with berries and leaves, freeze it and replace the cup with a candle, for a great centrepiece.’

‘Special wrapping transforms simple gifts’

LAURA MARK, 40, from London, works for a firm of architects

‘Last year, I gave sets of three lavender sachets to my WI friends and wrapped up homemade fudge for friends in my book group. Pretty packaging makes simple gifts look special. I use brown paper and baking parchment, with simple satin ribbon (bought in bulk online), baker’s twine (also bought online), vintage lace or strips of fabric. My favourite trick is to wrap a package in plain paper, then wrap a strip of more expensive paper around it and finish with a ribbon.’

