

# Fredrika from Karlstad lives a life without rubbish

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Fredrika Syren from Karlstad lives a life without rubbish with her family in San Diego in the USA.

PHOTO: JULIA LARSON

**A life without rubbish. Fredrika Syren from Karlstad lives with her family in San Diego, California.**

**On top of that, the family saves time and money - and stress less.**

**- We have always been there for our children, she says.**

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Fredrika Syren is 51 years old and born in Jönköping, but grew up in Karlstad, where she lived until the mid-1990s.

- I consider myself a warmlander, she says on Skype from San Diego in California, USA, where she now lives with her husband and three children.

In their garden, they grow most of their food. But it was in Värmland that the environmental interest was aroused.

- I grew up in a family that appreciated being outdoors a lot. Especially my grandfather, he loved everything that had to do with nature, being out and about and he loved animals. He was babysitting when I was little. So I think my love of nature comes from him.

## Debris-free inspiration

Environmental issues have followed Fredrika Syren all her life. But when she gave birth to her daughter Bella in 2006, something changed.

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- I felt that climate change will have an effect on her and her future.

In the same vein, she heard an interview with a man who would live with his family without creating any waste for a year - in the middle of New York.

- They just walked or cycled, they did not use an elevator, they had no electricity in their apartment in the middle of winter ...

She thought it sounded completely crazy, but still thought she could do a little bit

herself.

- I started, my husband James was completely against it in the beginning. He thought it was too much, too hard. He needed his Starbucks coffee every morning, he needed lunch in the restaurant and dry cleaning and everything.

But when the family just had their third child and lived in Sweden in 2013, James began to feel exhausted and took parental leave.

- We lost a lot of his income of course and then this with zero garbage became more interesting for him because it saved us a lot of money. All of a sudden he became very interested and decided "we should get rid of the rubbish bin and we should try to be zero waste", says Fredrika and laughs.

And that's the way it is.

## The children are involved

The daughter Bella, who started it all, is today 14 years old. And she's not interested in changing her lifestyle.

- Sometimes someone says "oh, is that your mother's bullshit?" when she says something, but she's pretty strong so she says "no, that's my opinion and that's a fact".



The 14-year-old daughter Bella stands up for the family's lifestyle, even when she sees that other families live differently.

PHOTO: JULIA LARSON

Fredrika Syren says that it has not been difficult to get the children to live without litter, they take it for granted because they grew up with it.

- I do not think my youngest, who is seven years old now, understands one hundred percent that there are people who actually have bins at home.

But not least Bella is now so big that she sees that other families live differently.

- Her best friend drowns in clothes and stuff and pinals.

She takes an example with a certain kind of doll, which is very popular in the United States.

- Bella was so proud when she got her only doll, while her friend probably had 20 of these dolls and all the clothes and accessories. And in the beginning, of course, Bella was a little jealous. But one thing I noticed was that Bella who had a doll took



such good care of it, she only had one. While the friend who was constantly getting new and new and new, she did not take care of hers. They broke and she lost them.

## Consumption costs time

Fredrika Syren also points out that consumption costs, even in time.

- The friend's parents work very hard to pay for this lifestyle, while we work at home, so we have always been there for our children.

Her husband works part-time and takes care of the work from home while she herself receives income from her books and lectures. It gives more time to get involved with the kids.

- We are always volunteers in the classrooms, we cook and bake and when their friends come here we play games with them. I think they see and appreciate that difference.

Stress also decreases.

- We both have more time for our children, our children are happier, my husband is much healthier and happier and that is incredibly important.

## Saves SEK 150,000

She says the family saves about \$ 18,000 a year by living as they do. This corresponds to approximately SEK 150,000.

- That was the reason why my husband jumped on this, when he discovered how much we saved.



The children Liam and Noah at the family's pantry, which is completely free of disposable packaging.

PHOTO: JAMIE STREET

### **What do you save money on?**

- Disposable items cost an incredible amount of money. And when you buy food that is already packaged, you pay for the packaging. We grow our own food, a bag of seeds may cost a dollar and from a seed bag of say carrots we get maybe 40-50 carrots.

In San Diego, most families have two cars, but Fredrika and her family are content with one.

- Here we must have a car. In Sweden we did not need a car. We save an incredible amount of money by cycling the rest of the time. We save money by not buying completely new clothes all the time.

She says that they also save on not traveling as much as many others, even if they travel to Sweden once a year, except now in pandemic times.

- We cook our own food, we eat at home most of the time and live very minimalist and do not buy things all the time.

## Luxurious with recycling

The family buys toilet paper, made from recycled paper, but not kitchen paper. The food they need to buy they buy in bulk to also minimize recycling, which is not at all as well developed in the US as in Sweden.

- I do not think you think about it when you live in Sweden, how luxurious it is that you can recycle everything.

They buy all clothes, except socks and underwear, used and leave everything that is worn out for recycling. And so they compost food waste. All to avoid something ending up in the dump.



The whole family, husband James and children Noah, Liam and Bella, are involved in living litter-free. "I do not think my youngest, who is seven years old now, understands one hundred percent that there are people who actually have rubbish bins at home," says Fredrika Syren.

PHOTO: JULIA LARSON

Fredrika Syren does not think it takes much extra time to live without rubbish.

- It does not. In the beginning, of course, when we tried to figure everything out, it took a little more time, but now it just rolls on.

The family bakes their own bread and makes their own jam, something that makes many Americans raise their eyebrows.

- I make peach jam because we have peach trees in the garden here and people get "ah!" when I come and give them peach jam.

She brings that way of thinking with her from home.

- I think it's a Swedish thing to do that, to pick mushrooms and berries.

## Cultivates most food

The family is vegetarian while Fredrika Syren is vegan and does not eat eggs or dairy products. They grow 80 percent of their food in the garden - from broccoli to garlic and citrus fruits - and have their own chickens.

### **Doesn't it take a lot of time to grow food for five people?**

- We both work at home, so that makes it easier. Of course, it takes its little time, but it also takes time to go to the store and shop. It tastes much better and the whole family is involved in this. The children see it almost as a school, they learn math and biology and everything by being out in the garden with us.





In the garden, the family grows 80 percent of their food, which saves a lot of money.

PHOTO: JULIA LARSON

**If someone is eager to reduce their waste, which end is good to start with, so that you do not give up?**

- That you should start composting. In Sweden, it is a little more difficult in the winter because the composts freeze in the winter, but compost is a great idea. Another is to make your own cleaning products. They cost an incredible amount of money. You can clean the whole house with vinegar, lemon and baking powder, it will be just as clean.

## Film

Fredrika Syren blogs and has written two books about the family's lifestyle and an almost new film called "Zero time to waste" is also about them and how they live. She thinks the film has changed the way people react. Many have previously perceived them as odd.

- They gained insight into our lives and why we do this. We do it for a reason, it's not

only to save the planet, although of course it's a huge part, but also because it gives us more time for each other.

At the same time, she says that the four years with Donald Trump in the White House have been a difficult period, because he, among other things, tore up a lot of environmental legislation and made the United States leave the Paris Agreement.

- Then I felt that I could just as easily give up. But then my mentor said "but Fredrika, he will disappear, hopefully in four years, and what we do now is that we gather strength".



The food is not stored in disposable packaging and most is grown in your own garden.

PHOTO: JAMIE STREET

She believes that the incoming president, Democrat Joe Biden, has a more ambitious climate policy and believes that Trump has rather created a backlash.

## Changed climate is noticeable

The family is already noticing the climate change where they live, not least this year.

- We had big fires. It used to happen every now and then when we first moved here. Now they happen several times a year and they are not small fires, they are incredible fires. Throughout August, it was 45 degrees, which is not normal for San Diego.

She says that it increases interest in the climate issue.

- All of a sudden people say "oh shit", now you feel that climate change is here.

She describes her hometown as more conservative than the rest of California, which is a strong liberal stronghold in the United States.

- Here it is the case that if you are a conservative, you do not believe in climate change.

But now Fredrika Syren is starting to notice that it is fluctuating, also among Republicans.

- Especially after the big fires in August here, even the conservatives are starting to say "okay, what was it you said we could do?" So I think it's coming, it's tough, but it's coming.

## **Fredrika Syrén**

Age: 51 years

Lives: San Diego in California, USA.

Family: Husband James, children Bella, Noah and Liam.

Eats: Vegan

Do: Blog and write about family life without waste. Has written the book "Zero time for families" and she and the family participate in the documentary "Zero time to waste" which is about the family's litter-free lifestyle.







## Fruit straps

"My children love fruit strips and it can be made on almost any fruit and is a fun natural candy without sugar and which the children can help make," writes Fredrika Syrén.

- 2 ripe bananas
- 2 dl optional fresh or frozen fruit or berries
- Optional seasoning such as a little vanilla, cinnamon or cardamom

1. Mix bananas and the fruit and any seasoning to a smooth batter.

2. Set the oven to 55 degrees.

Spread the batter about 3 millimeters thick on a baking sheet on a baking sheet.

4. Place the plate in the oven and let it stand until the batter has dried and has a leathery consistency.

Carefully pull off the baking paper and cut or cut straps to a suitable size and store in an airtight jar.

More recipes are available at [zerowastefamily.com](http://zerowastefamily.com).



It is easy to clean without lots of chemicals and detergents.

PHOTO: JAMIE STREET

## Zero waste oven cleaning

You need:

- ½ dl detergent
- 1 dl bicarbonate
- ½ dl coarse sea salt
- hot water.
- Rubber gloves

Mix soap, baking powder and salt with water to a batter.

Use rubber gloves and cover the oven with the batter.

Let it work overnight.

Wipe the oven with a damp sponge and warm water.

## We throw so much in Sweden

Last year, 4.8 million tonnes of household waste were disposed of in Sweden. This corresponds to 467 kilos per person.

Even more waste comes from businesses. In 2018, 35.2 million tonnes of waste was generated from these in Sweden. In addition, 104 million tonnes of waste from mines are mined. In addition to the mines, it is construction, waste management and wholesale of scrap that create the most waste in Sweden.

Today, half of all waste is incinerated and the energy from incineration is utilized. 34 percent of the waste becomes new things. 15.5 percent is treated biologically and becomes biogas or biofertilizer. What remains, half a percent, is put in the landfill. Garbage sorting is an important reason why more is recycled.

The amount of rubbish has increased significantly. In 1975, households generated 2.6 million tonnes of waste. In 2019, that figure was 4.8 million tonnes. This is an increase of almost 85 percent. During the same period, the population has increased by almost 26 percent. Thus, each person throws more than in the mid-1970s.

**Sources:** Avfall Sverige (the municipalities' industry organization for waste management) and sopor.nu (a collaboration between, among others, Avfall Sverige, the Packaging and Newspaper Collection and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency)



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