

Take a DIY masterclass

WHAT did you get up to last weekend? A spot of painting, a touch of drilling, perhaps you even put up some shelves? According to a home improvement report by HSBC 52 per cent of us schedule in some DIY for bank holidays.

And with money tighter than ever — and the internet firing on all cylinders in every home — we can all be dab hands. B&Q reported last month that paint sales have jumped more than 21 per cent year-on-year and wallpaper by 10 per cent, but many householders are doing more than simply sprucing up their walls.

DIY expert Sylvia Marshall says that home owners are putting in windows, plastering walls and fitting new kitchens themselves.

Her website (bubsydogdiy.com) provides information to guide users through home improvements — and she receives all sorts of requests. According to Marshall people are noticeably more adventurous compared with when she set up the website five years ago.

'We now receive 3,000 emails a day asking for information — it was only 300 when we started. Readers of our site are taking on big jobs: putting up conservatories, fitting

Become a dab hand in the house (and save money) with a little help from the internet

their own kitchens and mending things rather than replacing them.

'I believe you can learn everything you need to know online to maintain your home for years, without succumbing to costly tradesmen,' says Marshall.

She does advise leaving the electrics and plumbing to the experts, though. Especially if you are renting out a property — when you need certificates for any electrical work done.

But, she says that the quality of information now available online means that if you do your research, you can perform most tasks.

'If you feel daunted, you can always hire someone, watch and learn from them,' she suggests. 'We recommend learning about the job

you're about to do then doing it, not learning as you go.'

There are plenty of sites offering advice to DIY enthusiasts: YouTube has a vast array of instructional videos from converting attics into bedrooms, (which is explained in just 1 minute 38 seconds) and more detailed step-by-step videos on instructing viewers in how to replace an old window, for example.

Richard Watt, a 36-year-old IT contractor who lives in a four-bedroom house in Edinburgh with his wife Fiona, 36, and 18-month-old son, Adam, refurbished the kitchen of his previous home, seeking advice from Google and bubsydogdiy.com.

'I have had problems with tradesmen in the past. We hired builders to refurbish our kitchen for our first



flat and it was a disaster — we ended up arguing over money for five months then having to do most of the work ourselves.

'Since then I've taken the attitude that if I can do it well enough and safely enough then I will. I redid the kitchen in my old flat, taking it from a tired room to something modern and classic. I replaced the doors, worktops and taps.

'While it is pretty obvious how to replace a kitchen cupboard, reading up on it on the internet showed me how to do it well — including details like the spacing of the hinges.

'It also lets you plan what you are going to do — work out what tools you need in advance — which saves you multiple trips to the DIY shop.

'Had we paid tradesmen to do it I

think it would have cost about £10,000 — by doing it myself we spent £2,000. You can get high-quality advice on the internet.'

But if you'd rather stick with the professionals — try the new app *HomeMade*, which estimates how much a variety of jobs should cost, from basement conversion to new floors.

It calculates the cost based on the size of the property, postcode, standard of finish. It even includes a contingency amount — to be spent on unforeseen events.

■ OTHER sites offering advice include: diydoctor.org.uk; lets-do-diy.com; ultimatehandyman.co.uk and diyfixit.co.uk.

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