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Five Tips for Starting Vegetable Seedlings Indoors More Cheaply

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There are a variety of reasons why gardeners start their vegetable plants inside. Many do it to save money on the high price of organic seedlings at the garden center. The truth is starting seeds indoors can be even more costly than buying plants. So if saving money is your goal, you need to be careful to keep costs down.

But saving money isn?t the only reason to start plants early. In the northern U.S., vegetable gardeners start their plants indoors to get a jump on the short growing season. If you?re growing plants early in hoop houses, for example, commercial seed starts probably won?t be ready in time. Others like to make sure seedlings are grown organically under the best possible growing conditions. Still others can?t buy the varieties they want at the garden center.

If you are starting seeds inside, as so many on KGI will, here are five tips for keeping costs down.

1. **Build your own seedling starting unit.** Retail seedling starting units with grow lights are expensive. One with enough space for a reasonable-sized garden will cost about $350. At that price, it will take forever to make your money back by starting seedlings. But even a ?handyman challenged? person such as myself can make one for half or even one-third the price. See this video post Build an Indoor Seedling Starting Unit [1] for an inexpensive, easy-to-build unit. Those with more skill with tools could probably save even more.

2. **Get rare heirloom seeds free.** Many people start seeds indoors to save money, yet empty their pockets buying seeds. That?s okay if searching through seed catalogs is what you enjoy, but with a little more work, you can get rare varieties for free. See how I got three unusual heirloom tomatoes from the USDA Agricultural Research Service at Rare Vegetable Seeds from U.S. Government [2]. I didn?t even pay postage and the USDA would have sent me more seeds if I had asked.

3. **Compare Seed Prices Easily with Google for Seeds**. If you?re still planning on buying pricey rare seeds, you can still shop around for the best prices easily. Use this Google search tool from Mother Earth News at Find Exactly the Varieties You Want [3] to locate the best deals from the seed catalogs.

4. **Make seedling pots from newspaper.** Peat pots and trays add to the cost of your garden and some of us question if peat is environmentally sustainable. I also wonder if peat contributes to dampening off of seedlings, the most common seedling starting problem. On the other hand, cow manure pots cost a fortune. Soil block makers can be difficult to use because it?s hard to get the right formula for the soil media. But paper pots are easy to make and don?t cost a cent. See this video showing you how to Make Paper Pots [4] from Dave?s Garden.

5. **Mix your own organic seed starting mix.** If you start a lot of seedlings, you may want to mix your own seed starting mix. But in most cases, it?s cheaper to buy it off the shelf. I don?t advise sterilizing your own mix in your kitchen oven. I?ve never tried it, but too many people tell me it really smells up the house. Here?s My Plan for Seed Starting Mix [5].

I?m sure you know about other ways to reduce the cost of starting seeds indoors. That?s the real beauty of this forum. Please let me know how you do it in the comment section below so everyone can take advantage of your great ideas.

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[1] http://www.suburbanhobbyfarmer.com/build-indoor-seedling-starting-unit/
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