



HOW TO CREATE A



Simple Indoor Seed Starting System

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Contents



Homemade Grow Light System	4
Repurposed Seed Starting Containers	5
<i>Homemade Paper Pots</i>	5
<i>Toilet Paper Tubes</i>	6
<i>Recycled Potting Trays/Packs</i>	6
<i>Random Containers and Pans</i>	6
<i>Egg Cartons</i>	7
<i>Eggshells</i>	7
<i>Ice Cube Trays</i>	7
<i>DIY Soil Blocks</i>	8
<i>Peat Pellets (not as frugal, but practical)</i>	10
Potting Soil	10
<i>Homemade Potting Soil Recipe</i>	12
Planting the Seeds	13



Starting seeds indoors doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Not only will starting your own seeds give you much greater variety, it can potentially save you *hundreds of dollars* over the course of a year!

Homemade Grow Light System



I used to be cheap with my seed starting, and I tried to use winter sunlight on my basement steps to start seeds. Not surprisingly, this wasn't a very effective way to get seeds to sprout and I had many disappointing years!

I started using this practical, yet simple DIY seed starting lighting system to start my garden, and it has proven to be much more successful!

Equipment/Supplies:

- ▶ Metal shelving
- ▶ 4' fluorescent shop lights
- ▶ Small bits of light chain (*may come with your shop lights*)

We looked at some table-style models, but decided to use some simple metal shelving we already had hanging around.

For starting large groups of seedlings, grow lights are much preferred to window light. We found some 4-foot fluorescent T8 lights and they just so happened to fit perfectly with our shelf, and they were pretty affordable too. We attached them to the underside of the shelves with a bit of chain.

Repurposed Seed Starting Containers

There are many options for seed starting pots that you can use under your lighting system.

Here are some frugal DIY seed starting pot ideas:

Homemade Paper Pots

Homemade newspaper pots are simple to make, and you can make pots of any size. I also love them since you can place the pot directly into the soil.

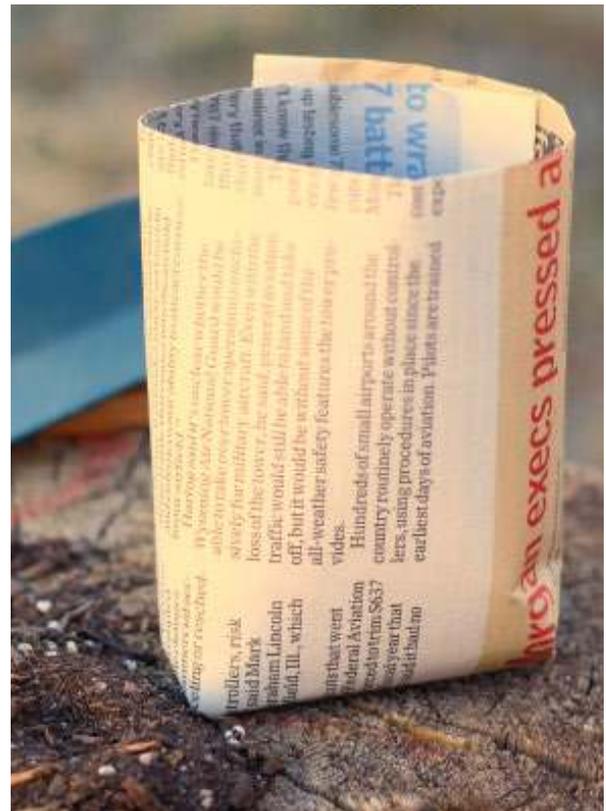
[For step-by-step photos of process, click here!](#)

YOU WILL NEED:

- ▶ Newspaper (one full “fold-out” sheet will make 2 pots)
- ▶ A drinking glass (or any other cylindrical object that you can wrap the paper around – it needs to have straight sides)
- ▶ Masking tape (2 pieces per pot)
- ▶ Potting soil

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. If you are starting with a full sheet of newspaper, tear it in half along the fold.
2. Now fold it in half lengthwise.



3. Grab your cylindrical object (*aka straight-sided drinking glass*) and place it halfway on the paper. You will want the bottom half of the glass inside the newspaper roll, and the top facing out.
4. Roll the paper all the way up, and secure with a strip of tape. There will be several inches of paper hanging off the end of the glass.
5. Fold the paper over the bottom of the glass like you are wrapping a gift, and secure it with another bit of tape.
6. Place your finished pots in a tray (*or other holder*) and fill with potting soil. I like to use the foil lasagna pans or trays that come with the clear plastic lids. I keep the lids on while the seedlings are tiny, which keeps them warm and prevents them from drying out as quickly. It's an improvised mini-greenhouse.
7. When you are ready to transplant your seedlings gently tear the bottom third off to expose the roots.

Toilet Paper Tubes

These are easy enough to come by, and I like that they are biodegradable and can be put directly into the ground. An easy way to use toilet paper tubes is to cut a slit in the bottom and fold them over to form a small cup.

Recycled Potting Trays/Packs

If you've purchased those little plastic packs of flowers or vegetable starts in the past, don't toss the containers. These can easily be re-filled with soil and used again and again.

Random Containers and Pans

I've experimented with quite the hodge-podge of containers in the past. Really, any sort of small container or pan will work! You may or may not need to poke holes in the bottom to allow for drainage. (*Look for flexible containers that will allow you to squeeze them – this will save you much*



headache during planting time. If you use rigid containers, it can be quite difficult to remove the root mass without damage...)

A FEW IDEAS:

- ▶ Small yogurt cups
- ▶ Sour cream/cottage cheese containers
- ▶ Milk cartons (cut the top off)
- ▶ Foil roasting trays or lasagna pans (Sometimes they come with a clear plastic lid that fits over the top. This can help to create a mini-greenhouse effect and keep your little babies from drying out.)

Egg Cartons

Egg cartons are a favorite seed-starting item for many folks. Pack each cup full of soil, and simply cut each section apart when you are ready to plant or transplant into a bigger pot.

Eggshells

Ah... eggshells. So much potential in such a little item. They work well for containing your tiny seedlings. My only worry would be that they are a little on the small side— you probably won't want to plant larger veggies in them (aka tomatoes), or plan to transplant to a larger pot quickly.

Ice Cube Trays

I'm always finding piles of old plastic ice cube trays at yard sales and thrift stores. These would make ideal little compartments for smaller seeds.

DIY Soil Blocks

I have two different styles you can choose from. The first one (*the classy tin can model*) was my project on Sunday afternoon. I like that one because it's super simple and super cheap. But then hubby came along and decided he could make it even better, so I'm including his version as well.

DIY Soil Block Maker (the classy tin can version)

YOU WILL NEED:

- ▶ An empty tin can (*I think the one I used was the 15 oz size—or something like that*)
- ▶ A chunk of dowel or a round/square wooden stick of some sort (*scrap lumber is great*)
- ▶ A screw (or two)
- ▶ Potting soil
- ▶ Water
- ▶ A pan/tray to hold the blocks



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Remove both ends from the can. You'll need to save one end, but you can toss the other one.
2. Attach the lid of the can to the dowel/stick with the screw. We drilled a guide hole first, and then screwed it together. My one caution is to watch the sharp edges of the can/lid. It's a good idea to wear gloves when you are using this version of the soil block maker to avoid cutting yourself on the sharp edges.

3. Mix the potting soil with the water. The amount of water you need depends on the soil, and it will take a bit of trial and error to get the right consistency.
4. You want the soil to be very moist and able to form a ball when you smoosh it together in your hand. If it's too dry, the block won't hold together. If it's too wet, you'll have a flood of water squirting out the bottom when you compress the soil. Just play around with it until you get a consistency that works.
5. Once you've arrived at the right combo of soil/water, fill the can 3/4 of the way full with the moist soil. Use the plunger (aka lid and stick) to firmly press the soil and compact it into a block. Use the plunger to push it out the bottom of the can.
6. Congratulations! You've make your first soil block.
7. Use your finger (or the eraser-end of a pencil) to make an indentation in the soil block, and place your seed in the soil.

DIY Soil Block Maker #2 (Christian's new-and-improved version)

YOU WILL NEED:

- ▶ A piece of PVC pipe
- ▶ A round of wood (Christian used a holesaw to cut the circle of wood to fit inside)
- ▶ A dowel or chunk of old rake/broom handle
- ▶ A screw



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cut the piece of PVC pipe to size (*ours is 2" in diameter and around 6" tall, but this is very flexible. Just use what you have*)
2. Screw the wood plug onto the dowel.
3. Follow the above directions to form the soil blocks.



Peat Pellets (not as frugal, but practical)

I often use peat pellets because they are cheap, easy to use, and they don't take up a whole lot of space.

There are plenty of options for seed growing containers, use what you can and don't be afraid to experiment!

Potting Soil

I've always kinda cringed when I've thrown those green and yellow bags of potting soil in my shopping cart at the garden store. I figured there was a better way, but never took the time to figure it out... Until now.

Thankfully, my homemade potting soil recipe is pretty darn easy to throw together. And it'll save you some money too.

Truthfully, mixing your own homemade potting soil recipe isn't rocket science, and there are plenty of ways to make it happen. A good potting mix will:

- ▶ Be firm enough to support the plant
- ▶ Be light enough to allow air/water to flow with minimal compaction
- ▶ Be free of weed seeds and potential pathogens

But here is why I chose the ingredients I did:



COCONUT COIR: Many DIY potting mix recipes call for peat moss, but since there is so much debate regarding mining from peat bogs, I decided to steer clear of it and opt for coir instead. Coconut coir is a by-product of the coconut-processing industry, and is basically ground-up coconut husk fibers. It is a fantastic choice for soil-less potting mix, as it retains water beautifully. I got mine in a big brick, and had to soak it in water before it was ready to use. You can substitute it 1:1 for peat moss in potting soil recipes.

PERLITE: Perlite is a lightweight volcanic rock. It holds water and helps to aerate the soil and keep it from compacting. Some people also use vermiculite or plain ol' coarse sand in place of perlite in homemade potting soil recipes, too.

COMPOST: Well, you know what compost is, so I really don't have to explain this one. Compost adds nutrients to the soil and it's usually pretty much free if you make it at home yourself. Just make sure to use finished compost to avoid "burning" your plants or introducing weed seeds into your pots. Also, I used the finest compost I could find in my pile– you may need to sift yours if you have chunky stuff. Worm castings are another great option here.

Homemade Potting Soil Recipe

YOU WILL NEED:

- ▶ 2 parts* coconut coir
- ▶ 1 part finished, sifted compost
- ▶ 1 part perlite

**a "part" can be anything you like– a measuring cup, a coffee can, a five-gallon bucket, etc. It just depends on how much potting soil you want to make.*



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. If your coir came in a block, you'll need to hydrate it. I did this by allowing the coir "brick" to sit in water until I was able to break it apart. I then added more water until it was easy to flake apart in my hands and very moist.
2. Next, mix the coir and compost. Add more water if you need too – I found it much easier to handle/mix if the mixture was damp.
3. Add in the perlite, give it a stir, and you're ready to go!
4. Use your homemade potting soil recipe like you would store-bought mix.

Planting the Seeds

Prepare your seed starting peat pellets or potting soil by making it damp, put in the designated seed starting pots and/or trays, and planting your seeds according to the directions on the package.

Cover them with a bit of plastic wrap (*this is optional, but it helps provide a bit of that greenhouse effect*) and keep them in a warm, dark place until they begin to sprout.

After that, transfer them to directly underneath the grow lights and keep the lights on them for 16 hours (or so) a day. Watch the pots or pellets carefully to keep them from drying out. It's best if the soil can stay consistently damp.

Depending on the size of container you start with, you may need to transplant the seedlings into increasingly bigger pots 1-2 more times before they are ready to transplant into the garden. (*This is especially important with plants like tomatoes, cabbage, peppers, broccoli, etc.*) Then once the soil has warmed sufficiently outside, out to the garden they go!

If you are going to transplant the little peat or coir pellets directly into the garden, be sure to tear the netting off of the bottom of the pellet, as sometimes it can hamper the growth of the mature plant.



About the Author



Jill Winger and her family pursue a lifestyle of modern homesteading on the wide-open prairies of Wyoming. She blogs at The Prairie Homestead where she encourages others to return to their roots, no matter where they live. Her practical and authentic style of teaching and storytelling has won the hearts of over 500,000 homesteaders across social media who look to her for advice and reassurance in creating from-scratch meals, using essential oils, and growing their first garden. **Jill** has been featured in *HuffPost*, *BuzzFeed*, and *Fox News Magazine* and leads a thriving essential oil tribe of over 32,000 members.

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