

## Pondered In My Heart

March 30, 2010

### Frugal Gardening Tips



If you have been reading here for any length of time you know I love flowers, the more the better. Like anything, gardening can be very expensive, but the cost need not be prohibitive. I've compiled a list of frugal gardening tips that have made it possible for me to continuously expand my gardening of both flowers and edibles while minimizing the monetary output.

My number one tip would be to start your plants from seed. I remember fondly a lovely older couple who lived in our old neighborhood, and as we lived right across the street from them I benefited from the delectable feast of floral eye candy that was their front yard. I always enjoyed watching them every spring as day after day they would come home with a trunk full of annual flats with an occasional ornamental tree or two, and I loved to see the two of them potter about filling up the beds together. But this is not my way. Long ago I learned to start my plants from seeds, and this saves a vast amount of money compared to what it would cost to buy all these plants. More on how I start my seeds here: [Inch by Inch, Row by Row](#).



*Edited to add:* Barbara mentioned in the comments the issue of having a place to put all of the seedlings. This reminded me that in our old house we didn't have a lot of room so I had a shelf to hold all of the seedlings. It was a black plastic shelving unit about five feet tall, and we kept it in front of our southern exposure glass door. We wrapped clear vinyl around three sides of the shelf and secured it with packing tape. The plastic along with the shelf being black helped to keep it warm and humid inside, and my several hundred seedlings always thrived. It's the same principle as the fancy mini greenhouses they sell in the catalogs, but for a whole lot less money. Here is a dreadful ancient-before-digital-cameras picture, but it's all I could find and you might be able to get the idea:



Even buying seeds can seem expensive, but it helps to remember that seeds can be saved for several years. For example, a packet of 25 squash seeds will last me for about three years. If you are perusing seed catalogs you'll notice a wide variance in prices as well, with all of the latest and greatest costing the most. I keep a garden notebook and write down what I plant from year to year, and these notes help me to remember what varieties I like and what does well where. I try to follow a middle ground here, choosing some pricier varieties like wave petunias and my favorite big red zinnias,



but also picking some less expensive items like plain marigolds and sunflowers as well. But again, even the cost of wave petunia seeds is much less than it would cost to buy plants.



Heirloom varieties are a usually a great value and cost a lot less than trendy hybrids. You can also save the seeds from open pollinated heirloom varieties to use in subsequent years and save money. Again I like a combination of some new hybrids and old timey favorites like lemon cucumbers.



And the taste of heirloom tomatoes are truly something special; Aunt Ruby's German green, Brandywine, and yellow pears are some favorites that are inexpensive to boot.



Back to flowers, another tip is to plant varieties that reseed freely such as alyssum, violas, marigolds, and many groundcovers. For the cost of one seed packet I have had a border of alyssum along my front walkway for years.



Many perennials can be grown easily from seed, and they will reseed and multiply over time to give you more plants which you can transplant to increase your blooms. I brought these blanket flowers over when we moved, and I keep replanting little divisions here and there to further increase my plants.



These coneflowers I started from seed are another good example, and I now have them tucked into many beds for a fraction of what the cost would be for one plant.



Just a few words about potted flowers: overwinter, overwinter, overwinter! I have had this pot of begonias for years - I just cut it back and bring it inside for the winter and in the spring it gets a trim and goes back out again. I like to have lots of pots on my porch and deck and so forth, and it would cost a fortune to have to get new ones every year. I've enjoyed [these geraniums](#) for years as well - they grace my kitchen in the winter and return to the deck every summer.



Let your gardening friends and neighbors know that you are interested in expanding your beds and you will likely find they are happy to share perennial divisions, extra seedlings or plant thinnings. Also, check on craigslist and freecycle for free plants, particularly in spring when people are cleaning up beds and planning new plantings. You can also place 'wanted' listings on these sites, and offering to come and dig for yourself is always a help. We added some lovely irises, roses and several other plants to our landscape in this way.



Another possible source is leftovers and extras from church decorations. A friend gave us many pots of old, spent chrysanthemums leftover from Easter, and they have done very well planted in my beds. Knowing we had lots of new beds to fill, this friend also brought lots of extra slips and divisions from the church grounds as well. You can always try asking landscapers for any extras they might be discarding, as it's their job to keep things from getting overcrowded and you might benefit from their pruning and thinning.



You can also get a good deal on things if you know when and where to look. Warehouse clubs typically sell bulbs in bulk packages at good prices, not necessarily super fancy varieties but you can get lots of lovelies for your money. It's tempting to want to buy everything you want in spring, but remember prices will drop as the season goes on. We got some butterfly bushes at a local store last fall on deep discount clearance prices - 97 cents a bush for plants that were originally \$12 each - they are just starting to wake up and leaf out nicely!



Another tip in the patience department is to buy smaller trees and shrubs rather than larger. Buying bareroot shrubs and trees via a reputable mail order catalog is less costly than buying large potted items from the local garden center. You just have to wait longer for your blooms or fruits.



Just remember you can spend as much or as little as you like in this gardening venture. You can buy fancy seed trays with special soil inserts and self watering systems with special heat and lights, or you can plant in paper cups on the kitchen floor. You can tie your plants up with special green flexible garden ties or you can cut up loops of old socks. You can buy expensive fertilizers, with special chemical ratios for each plant family, or you can make compost.

Have fun in all of your gardening adventures, and if you have any favorite frugal gardening tips I'd love to hear them!

**You might also like:**

