



The Gardener's Workshop
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Seed Starting with Soil Blocks

Mixing

Measure about 3 parts blocking mix to 1 part water. To begin try 24 cups blocking mix combined with about 8 cups of water. Any extra can be dried out and reused later. Wetting and mixing the blocking mix is much like mixing concrete. Allow time for the water to be absorbed by the mix before adding more water. The consistency desired is that of wet oatmeal.

Do not cover and store wet mix. Any unused mix should be left to dry out. You can re-wet and use later.

Blocking

Push the blocker down into the soil 2 to 3 times to fill the chambers. Scrape the excess mix off and place the blocker on the tray. Engage the plunger to eject the blocks. Rarely do the first efforts produce perfect soil blocks. As with any tool, use develops skill, so take the time to familiarize yourself with your soil blocker and develop a good technique for producing your seed starting blocks. The problem most often encountered is too little or too much water which is simply remedied with the addition of the lacking ingredient. Well compacted and well formed soil blocks hold up better over the weeks needed to sprout and grow your seedlings.

Sowing Seeds

Each soil block has a depression to receive the seed. Sow one seed per block according to the seed instructions. Those that need light to germinate are firmly placed on the surface and those that need darkness are pushed further down into the block. Very small seeds can more easily be sown using a toothpick that has been moistened with saliva.

Add Heat and Light to Maximize Seed Germination and Growth

Germination is quicker and better when bottom heat is used during the germination stage. Our propagation mat keeps the soil evenly warm, improves your germination success and helps to prevent soil borne diseases. Once 50% of the seeds have germinated, move seedlings to light.

To produce healthy, bushy and stocky seedlings give them 16 hours of intense light daily. Tall leggy seedlings are a result of low light conditions. Our adjustable table-top grow light takes only 24" of countertop and can support 200 growing small soil blocks.

Caring for Your Seeded Soil Blocks

- Keep your blocks evenly moist, but do not allow them to sit in water.
- Water gently from the side of the tray so as not to disturb the soil; do not water directly on blocks.
- If too much water is sitting in the tray, a small baby syringe can be used remove the excess.
- After the seeds germinate, feed with a liquid organic fertilizer according to directions.
- Misting is only necessary for those seedlings that have a hard shell. Moisture may be needed to soften the shell for it to be shed. (Zinnias, Sunflowers, etc.)

Planting the Blocks

Plants produced by blocking can be planted sooner than other methods. Young plants adapt more readily and don't suffer from root binding or other consequences as often as more mature plants. We have eliminated the step of "hardening off" the seedlings by covering the plants immediately after planting with our floating row cover. This reusable fleece fabric provides an environment that leads to success with all types of planting. It provides protection from the hot sun, drying winds, rabbit damage and also from the squirrels digging up the plants. The fabric lies directly on the plants. No support necessary and it can be held down with rocks or water jugs and left on until the plants are established (couple weeks).

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