

Soil Blocks: A Sustainable Solution for Seed Starting

Soil blocks are an eco-friendly alternative to traditional seed starting methods. Soil blocks require less plastic and developing seedling roots air prune so there's no root trauma when transplanting or potting up Let's dive into making them!

Materials Needed:

- Potting soil or seed starting mix
- Compost (optional)
- Water
- Soil block maker (can be purchased from Johnny's Selected Seed online or Eggplant Urban Farm Supply locally or DIY)
- Seed tray or flat

Recipe:

1. Prepare Soil Mixture:
 - In a large container, mix potting soil or seed starting mix with compost (optional) break up dried chunks if there are any
2. Add Water:
 - Gradually add water to the soil mixture while mixing (use your hands, great opportunity to play in the dirt) to create an evenly moist but not overly wet mixture. The mixture should be moist enough to hold together when squeezed, with minimal dripping.
3. Fill Soil Block Maker:
 - Take the soil block maker and fill each compartment with the moist soil mixture, push down into the soil, rock and twist the soil block maker in a couple of spots of fresh soil. Press down gently to ensure the soil is compacted. Once filled scrape the bottom edge so that the bottom of the soil blocks are even and flat.
4. Remove Soil Blocks to the Seed Tray:
 - Place the soil block maker into the tray where you want to put the soil blocks. As you expel the soil block maker, lift it. Each block should hold its shape. If the edges are crumbly, dump the soil back into the container, add more water, mix and try again. Soil blocks that start out falling apart will never get better.
5. Plant Seeds:
 - Use the indentation in the soil block, place 1-2 seeds into each and cover with a pinch of soil (unless other-wise specified)
6. Water:
 - After a day or two as the soil blocks start to dry out, lightly water the soil blocks to ensure they remain moist but not waterlogged. A spray bottle works well for this step. Or water from the bottom (using 2 trays one with drainage holes and one without stacked can make this process easier. Fill with water in the bottom after 10-15 minutes pull up the top tray so that they can drain and then dump the excess water).
7. Provide Light and Warmth:

- Place the seed tray in a warm, well-lit area. A sunny windowsill (this can cause some seedlings to get leggy- FYI) or under a grow light are ideal locations for seed starting.
- 8. Monitor Growth:
 - Keep an eye on the soil blocks and seedlings as they grow. Water as needed to maintain moisture levels and provide additional warmth if necessary.

You've just made soil blocks for starting seeds! This sustainable method reduces the need for plastic trays and peat pots. Enjoy watching your seeds grow into healthy seedlings ready for transplanting into the garden. Happy gardening!