

Soil Blockers

Save Money, Eliminate Waste, Reduce Transplant Shock, Help the Environment

What is the sustainable method of starting seeds? It's using a soil blocker. They are superior to most methods when it comes to reducing transplant shock and simply make transplanting easier. Additionally, you save money on supplies and eliminate the cheap plastic containers that take a long time to breakdown.

Soil block makers are hand-operated presses that make a compacted soil cube. You start seeds directly in the cube of compressed soil; no container is necessary. Since the cubes' sides are in contact with air, roots will stop growing when they reach the side of the block. Contrast that with seedlings grown in the typical retail greenhouse's flimsy plastic pots, in which the roots wrap around the space between the soil and plastic, becoming pot-bound.

When it comes time to transplant the cubes formed with soil block makers into the garden, just drop the block into the prepared hole. There's no prying a pot-bound seedling from a container; no accidentally damaging the root system. I've tried various

biodegradable containers designed to go right into the garden soil, including peat pots, peat and coconut blocks, even small paper bags designed to hold potting soil and seedlings. None of them decompose as quickly as advertised; this results in slower root growth after transplanting. Plus, buying new containers each year is an added expense.



Block makers come in several sizes, designed to handle different sized seedlings, or to allow potting-on from one size to the next. I've found the two-inch size covers most of my home-gardener needs. However for fast growing plants like tomatoes you may find a four-inch one a useful tool.

The only downside I've found is you must water the blocks frequently or they dry out. I put my blocks on any water tight tray that is handy such as disposable foil cookie baking sheets, or typical plastic nursery trays. When it's time to transplant, I carry the tray to the garden, dig a hole and put the soil block in ground.

Soil Block Recipe

How to Make the Mixture for Building Soil Blocks



- 1- Get a large water-tight open-top container where you'll make a mixture with "mud-like" consistency.
- 2- Choose an air-tight container to store the base fertilizer which is a mixture of dry minerals.
- 3- Select a measuring unit - as a cup, a bowl or any scooping container.
- 4- Make the base fertilizer. It's one unit of each, blood meal, colloidal phosphate and greensand. Mix well.
- 5- Mix $\frac{1}{8}$ units of lime with 30 units of coir
- 6- Add 20 units of perlite or coarse sand and mix well
- 7- Add $\frac{3}{4}$ unit of base fertilizer and mix well
- 8- Add 10 units of soil
- 9- Add 20 units of compost
- 10- Mix all dry ingredients well, then add enough water to make a very wet mixture (about 1 part water for 3 part mix)

