

Soil Blocking



Soil blocking is a technique for starting seeds. Rather than relying on trays or pots, you press soil into cubes that serve as the seed's container as well as its growing medium.

Follow these steps to perform soil blocking:

1. Mix the soil.

Use these components: 3 parts seed-starting mix
2 parts compost
All-purpose organic mineral fertilizer
Or use Fort Vee potting mix by Vermont Compost.

2. Wet the soil mix.

Once your dry ingredients are mixed, stir in water. Let the mix sit for 30 minutes to absorb the liquid. You want the final consistency to be like wet oatmeal or brownie mix.

3. Start blocking.

Dip your tool for small 3/4" micro blocks into a bowl of water; this will help prevent the soil from sticking to the metal when you push the soil blocks out. Then push the soil blocker into your damp soil mix, twisting slightly back and forth as you push down. Soil should be very firmly packed into each blocker.

Use a flat edge to smooth out the bottom of the blocks so they will sit level in their tray. Finally, push the soil blocks out of the blocker and into position on your seed tray.



Pushing the soil blocks onto a tray

Dip the blocker into water each time after putting the soil blocks on the tray, before making the next round of blocks.

4. Label your trays.

Add labels for the plant variety, today's date, days to germination, germination temperature, and light requirements.

5. Add seeds and then cover them.

Add seed(s) to each block by using a toothpick for precise placement in the divot. Then lightly cover each cube with either your soil mixture or a dusting of vermiculite (puffed mica). This helps keep seeds moist and insulated to ensure optimal germination.

Note: If you're starting seeds that need light to germinate, *don't* cover them; sunlight exposure is required for these seeds to sprout.



Placing the seeds

6. Set the covered tray on a heat mat.

Place the finished tray on a heat mat set to the ideal temperature range. Place the seed tray's dome over the top.

Water from below but don't allow standing water to remain in the bottom of the tray. Once the seeds germinate, remove the dome and immediately move to the seedlings to light.

About 7-10 days later, the seedlings will develop their first "true leaves" that resemble the leaves of mature plants. The plant roots will help hold the soil blocks together.



The seedlings' healthy root systems and the compressed soil give the block stability, keeping it from falling apart when watered.

7. Block up your seedlings.

In a few weeks, you'll want to "block up" your seedlings to the next size of soil blocks. You can use 2" mini blocks with $\frac{3}{4}$ " inserts; the inserts make a perfect $\frac{3}{4}$ " cube-shaped void in the center for nesting your $\frac{3}{4}$ " micro blocks inside.



Pepper seeds blocked up from the $\frac{3}{4}$ " micro blocks into the 2" mini blocks