

Coir As A Replacement For Peat Moss

by Carol Ann Harlos

Summary from Mother Earth News, February – March 2024 and Grower Talks January 2024

You are aware that the use of peat moss in gardening has led to the destruction of bogs. Peat moss has a high capacity for water retention and thus is an important component of seed starting mixes. It is used in mixtures for carnivorous plants and as a soil amendment for acid-loving plants such as azaleas, blueberries, and camellias.

Peat moss forms when partially decomposed plant material accumulates in the bottom of a wetland. The reason it doesn't fully decompose is due to the lack of oxygen. Peat bogs are carbon dioxide keepers. The CO₂ doesn't get into the atmosphere! Peat bogs hold more carbon dioxide than forests! This takes thousands of years! Peat bogs are found on every continent.

The use of peat moss is not sustainable. To removed the peat moss, the bogs must be drained. This destroys the bog!

What to do? Coir pith behaves much like peat not wood or bark. Growers have substituted up to 40% of peat with coir.

Magnification of coir and peat moss shows similarities in their structure. Both have tubes where water is held. Coir tubes are bigger, so they hold more water. Air replaces the water as the tubes empty. This dries out the coir faster and more oxygen reaches the roots!

If you have ever used peat moss you know that it is difficult to wet. Coir acts like a natural wetting agent! You can purchase coconut coir online or at big box stores.

Kathleen Contrino, a newly trained CCE Erie Climate Steward, wrote this article on peat moss and sustainability.

<https://cce.cornell.edu/orleans/peat-moss-and-sustainability>

Vegetable & Ornamental Seed Starting Mix

1 part coconut coir
1 part perlite
½ to one part vermiculite

Potting mix

6 parts coconut coir and com-
post
1 part perlite
1 part vermiculite

Carnivorous Potting Mix

1 part coconut coir
1 part perlite
1 part sand



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