



FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES

# Perfect Potting Mix Recipe Cards

Five proven DIY mixes — cut apart, pin up, and mix with confidence

**Ivy says:** "Here's a truth that'll save you money and frustration: the bag of potting mix at the garden center is not magic. It's a recipe — usually peat, perlite, and compost — that you can mix yourself for a fraction of the cost and customize for exactly what you're growing. These five recipes are straight from the book, tested and proven."

* All-Purpose Mix <span style="float: right;">Most vegetables &amp; herbs</span>	
<b>INGREDIENTS</b> <b>40% Peat moss or coir</b> <b>30% Perlite</b> <b>20% Compost</b> <small>well-aged, screened</small> <b>10% Vermiculite</b> <hr/> <small>Optional: 4-6 tbsp dolomitic lime per cu ft (if using peat) · 1-2 tbsp slow-release fertilizer per gallon</small>	<b>STEPS</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combine all ingredients in a large tub, wheelbarrow, or clean tarp</li> <li>Mix thoroughly — all components evenly distributed</li> <li>Add water and mix until evenly moist but not soggy</li> <li>If using lime, rest 24 hrs before using (pH stabilizes)</li> </ol> <hr/> <small>Volume: 1 cu ft = 7.5 gal · 2-3 cu ft bag fills 15-20 gallons of containers</small>
<p>+ Best for: tomatoes, peppers, most vegetables, all herbs <span style="float: right;">Yields: ~1 cu ft per batch</span></p>	

💧 Moisture-Retentive Mix <span style="float: right;">Greens &amp; thirsty plants</span>	* Fast-Draining Herb Mix <span style="float: right;">Mediterranean herbs</span>
<b>INGREDIENTS</b> <b>45% Peat moss or coir</b> <b>20% Perlite</b> <b>20% Vermiculite</b> <small>holds more moisture</small> <b>15% Compost</b>	<b>INGREDIENTS</b> <b>40% Peat moss or coir</b> <b>40% Perlite</b> <small>double the usual amount</small> <b>10% Coarse sand</b> <small>horticultural, NOT play sand</small> <b>10% Compost</b> <small>minimal — herbs prefer lean</small>
<b>STEPS</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mix dry ingredients thoroughly before adding water</li> <li>Add water gradually — absorbs more than all-purpose</li> <li>Mix until it feels like a wrung-out sponge</li> <li>Fill containers and plant immediately</li> </ol> <hr/> <small>Monitor carefully — use the Finger Test; this mix holds more water</small>	<b>STEPS</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mix dry ingredients, spreading sand evenly through perlite</li> <li>This mix drains fast — water sparingly after filling</li> <li>Allow to dry almost completely between waterings</li> <li>Do NOT add fertilizer at planting — lean soil is the point</li> </ol> <hr/> <small>Terracotta pots work beautifully with this mix — extra drainage</small>
<p>+ Best for: lettuce, spinach, arugula, cucumbers, basil, cilantro <span style="float: right;">+ Best for: rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage, lavender</span></p>	

❄️ Acid-Loving Plants Mix <span style="float: right;">Blueberries &amp; more</span>	☞ Simple 2-Ingredient Mix <span style="float: right;">Beginners &amp; budget</span>
<b>INGREDIENTS</b> <b>50% Peat moss only</b> <small>△ NOT coir — peat is acidic</small> <b>30% Perlite</b> <b>20% Pine bark compost</b> <small>or sulfur-acidified compost</small>	<b>INGREDIENTS</b> <b>50% Peat moss or coir</b> <b>50% Perlite</b>
<b>STEPS</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mix ingredients thoroughly</li> <li>Test pH with meter — target 4.5-5.5</li> <li>If pH too high: add elemental sulfur per package directions</li> <li>Retest after 2 weeks — pH adjustment takes time</li> </ol> <hr/> <small>Use rain water or acidified water to maintain pH during growing season</small>	<b>STEPS</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mix equal parts coir (or peat) and perlite</li> <li>Moisten thoroughly before planting</li> <li>Add slow-release fertilizer to every container at planting</li> <li>Begin liquid fertilizing every 1-2 weeks immediately</li> </ol> <hr/> <small>This mix lacks biological activity. Fertilize from day one — don't skip it.</small>
<p>+ Best for: blueberries, azaleas, rhododendrons, cranberries <span style="float: right;">+ Best for: anything, as long as you fertilize consistently</span></p>	



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[Ingredient glossary](#) · [Volume calculator](#) · [Mixing tips](#)

## 📖 INGREDIENT GLOSSARY — WHAT TO BUY

<b>Peat Moss</b> Acidic, fluffy base. Cheap and widely available. Not renewable but very effective. Sold in large compressed bales.	<b>Coconut Coir</b> Sustainable peat alternative. Neutral pH. Holds water well. Often sold as compressed bricks — expand in water first.	<b>Perlite</b> White volcanic glass beads. Improves drainage and aeration. Lightweight. Buy horticultural grade, not garden center "perlite mixes."	<b>Vermiculite</b> Mica-like mineral. Holds water and nutrients. Use where you want more moisture retention. Not a perlite substitute.	<b>Compost</b> Decomposed organic matter. Adds nutrients and biology. Must be well-aged and screened. Fresh compost can burn plants.	<b>Pine Bark Fines</b> Acidic, chunky amendment. Improves drainage and lowers pH. Use for blueberries and acid-lovers. Not bark mulch.
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## 📏 HOW MUCH DO I NEED? — VOLUME CALCULATOR

CONTAINER SIZE	CUBIC FEET NEEDED	APPROX. QUARTS
5-gallon container	0.7 cu ft	~18 quarts
10-gallon container	1.3 cu ft	~35 quarts
15-gallon container	2.0 cu ft	~50 quarts
20-gallon container	2.7 cu ft	~70 quarts
5 × 5-gal containers	3.5 cu ft	~90 quarts

Standard bag (2 cu ft) fills approximately 15 gallons of containers

### ✦ Ivy's Mixing Tips

- ✦ Mix in a large storage bin with a lid — shake to combine, then open and hand-mix
- ✦ Wear a dust mask when mixing perlite — the dust irritates lungs
- ✦ Pre-moisten coir bricks in warm water for 30 min before mixing — they expand 5-7x
- ✦ Make a big batch — extra keeps in a sealed bin for weeks
- ✦ Label your mix batch with the recipe so you remember what's in it

### ✗ Never Use These in Containers

- ✗ Garden soil — compacts and kills roots
- ✗ Play sand — too fine, reduces drainage
- ✗ Fresh (unaged) compost — burns roots
- ✗ Topsoil — same problem as garden soil