

Suggested compost mixtures.

For seeds:

3 parts John Innes Compost No.
1 part sand

For cuttings

1 part sand
1 part John Innes 2 or composted bark

For alpiners in pots

3 parts John Innes Compost No. 2
or 32 parts leafmould or composted
bark 1 part grit
1 part sand



For alpiners in sinks, troughs and raised beds

2 parts John Innes Compost No. 2 or 3
2 parts composted bark or leafmould
1 part grit
1 part sand

For ericaceous plants

A commercial ericaceous compost will do, but some dwarf rhododendrons will benefit from the addition of extra sand, up to 20% of the volume.





BIG ideas for small plants

Easy Composts for Alpines

Every nursery and garden center (and many Do-it-Yourself stores too!) stock a range of pre-packaged composts under many brand names, but most enthusiastic growers of alpines continue to make their own mixtures for growing alpines in containers, whether these be pots, sinks, troughs or whatever else they choose. It is easy to make your own composts, and not at all complicated.

Branded composts are designed to be suitable for leafy, fast-growing plants; just the opposite of what alpines need.

Many branded composts contain fast acting fertilizers to feed quick-growing plants, while alpines need a long-term supply of slowly-released nutrients.

Most alpines need good drainage, but most branded composts do not drain well enough to meet their needs.



Easy Composts for Alpines

Ingredients to mix your own composts?

John Innes Potting Compost.

This makes a convenient and readily available base. Growers usually choose No.2 or No. 3. Its chief advantage is that it is sterilized, so is free from weed seeds.



Grit

This opens up the compost and improves drainage. The ideal particle size is from about 5 mm down. All are suitable. Unless you know that the range of plants you grow are lime-loving, it is best to avoid limestone and Dolomite.



Sand.

Suitable materials are widely available under the names 'Concreting Sand' and 'Grit Sand' from Do-it-Yourself stores and builders' merchants. Rub some between your thumb and fingers. The particles should be sharp and angular (not smooth and rounded) and vary in size. It improves drainage.



Leafmould.

If you can get it or make it, the ideal alternative to peat. Oak or Beech are best. Gather the leaves when they are slightly moist, place in a black polythene bag, poke a few holes in it, fasten the top and store in an out-of-sight place. In 1 - 2 years the leaves will break down readily when rubbed through a garden sieve (about 7 mm or ¼ inch).



Composted bark.

Another alternative to peat, and a renewable resource! A fine grade, with fragments from about 8 mmdown works well. Again it lightens composts, lets in air, holds on to water and nutrients. It may be difficult to find, but is well-worth seeking out, as the results are so good.



Mixing your compost.

The basic recipes listed overleaf give the proportions of each component to use, measured by volume. Depending upon the quantity needed, you can use an empty pot or a special scoop. After a little while, you will begin to know instinctively what a 'good' mix looks and feels like. When asked about their own recipes, experienced growers often say 'I just throw the ingredients together and mix until it looks right.'

Check that your final compost mixture is slightly damp. If not, add a sprinkle of water and mix again. Take a handful of compost and squeeze it in your fist as hard as possible. Open your hand. If the compost falls apart, you have got it just right. If it stays in a lump, there is insufficient drainage; add a little more grit or sand (or both), remix and retest.



Extras.

To give long-term feeding of alpines in pots and troughs, add 1% by volume of bone meal to your mix.



