

Letters

Seed-sowing experiment

In the November 2007 Newsletter, an article by the late Peter Thompson suggested an unusual method of sowing seeds, and since January 2008 we have been following his technique with quite satisfying results.

The main problems with sowing in pots are the amount of space needed, disturbance by mice and birds, growth of mosses and liverworts, and keeping the moisture levels just right.

Instead, using Peter's method, we place a gritty mix of perlite and grit (sharp sand or, in our case, B&Q paving sand, a recycled glass product) into a pre-labelled and dated resealable sandwich bag, add the seeds, and water with a plant sprayer. The bags are placed in a transparent storage box in a cool, light room. We usually check the bags weekly, and it is very easy to spot any seeds that have germinated. The contents are then gently slid on to the surface of a prepared pot of seed compost, topped off with very fine grit from our local pet shop, and stood in a bowl of water for a few hours. Within a few days the tiny seedlings right

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Lobelia montana (its flowers unremarkable but its autumn display stunning) and *Codonopsis forrestii* are two of the unusual plants grown from seed this way

themselves and grow on quite happily. The reasons for using resealable bags are that they can be washed and used over and over again, and in the event of the mix drying out too much it is a simple matter to re-spray.

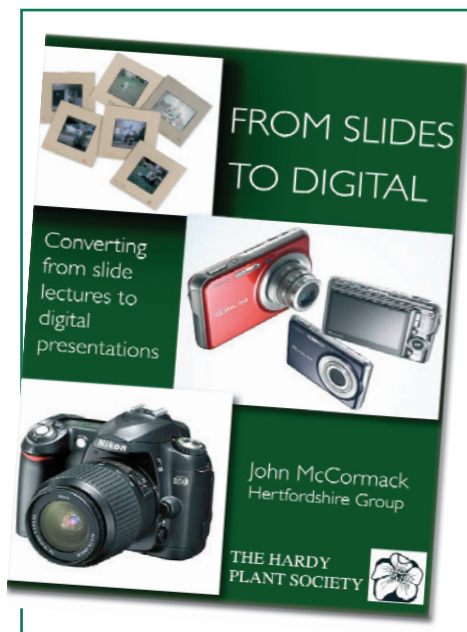
We always sow seed as soon as possible and soak large, coated seeds in the usual way. Whilst we have had failures and suspect this method won't work for some genera, we are still experimenting and, as of November 2009, the results so far for seed sown in 2008 are encouraging.

Out of 495 bags of seed (from a variety of sources), 307 have germinated – over 60% success. The main reason for failure is probably non-viable seed, but we suspect that some fine seed, for instance primula and gentian and seed from high-altitude plants, requires the open aspect of a pot. Some species germinate very quickly, 6 days is our record, and some are still germinating over a year later. Many species do exhibit a double dormancy so we expect to have a few more successes yet.

This method enables us to try to grow a very wide variety of plants as space is no longer an issue – even running a nursery we could never have housed 495 pots!

Ann and Bob Armstrong, Lincolnshire

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