MR. GROW IT

THE SOIL GUIDE

Soil or coco, how long the bag feeds the plant, how to water, how to read pH, and what I learned reusing the same soil eight times.

Soil vs coco • The nutrient-in-the-bag mistake • Watering • pH • Reusing soil

The short version

Most soil problems are watering problems or pH problems wearing a disguise. Learn when the pot is actually dry, keep the pH in range for your medium, and know that a bag of “hot” soil only feeds the plant for the first month. Do those three and most of the scary leaf pictures never happen.

The numbers, up front.

	Soil	Coco coir
pH range	6.0 – 7.0 (measure the runoff)	5.5 – 6.5 (I set the input to 5.8)
How often to water	Every 2–4 days, when it’s dry an inch down or the pot feels light	Every 1–2 days.
Food in the bag	A charged soil like Ocean Forest feeds for the first 20–40 days	A few days at most. You feed from the start
Easy to overwater?	Yes. Dense medium, roots choke.	Hard. Airy medium.
Root-zone air	Less	More. The main reason people switch.

SECTION 01

Soil or coco

Neither is “for beginners.” They trade time for control.

Pick soil if

- You want fewer trips to the garden. It holds water better, so you water every few days instead of daily.
- You want the first month handled. A charged soil comes with enough food for 20 to 40 days; just give plain water.
- You can live with the two downsides: it’s easy to overwater, and roots get less air, so growth is a little slower.

Pick coco if

- You want faster, more vigorous growth. The airy medium gets more oxygen to the roots.
- You tend to overwater. Coco forgives it.
- You don’t mind watering and mixing nutrients almost every day, and rinsing the salt out of bricks before you use them.

The honest answer

Less time in the garden: soil. Most growth and yield for the effort: coco. Both grow great plants. The pH range is different and that’s about it for difficulty.

SECTION 02

The nutrient-in-the-bag mistake

The most common beginner problem in soil, and the easiest to avoid.

A charged soil like FoxFarm Ocean Forest has enough food in it for roughly the first 20 to 40 days. New growers assume it lasts the whole grow. Around week four or five the plant starts showing deficiencies, they panic, and by then growth has already suffered. The fix is simple: know the clock is running, and start feeding before the plant tells you it's hungry.

Measuring what's in the medium

A TDS meter (people call it a PPM meter) reads how much dissolved nutrient is in your water, your nutrient mix, or the runoff from the pot. Small plants want a low number, big plants in flower want a high one. The ranges I use are in my book, *7 Steps To Grow Cannabis*.

Don't panic, it's organic

Test the runoff from fresh Ocean Forest and you'll see 2,000 PPM or more. That looks alarming next to a synthetic feeding chart. It isn't. That nutrition is throughout the whole mix and a plant with a small root zone doesn't have immediate access to all of it at once. New growers see the number, flush the pot, and wash the food down the drain. The PPM ranges on feeding charts are for bottled synthetic nutrients, not for charged organic soil.

"Hot" soil and "cooking"

When growers say soil is cooking, they usually mean microbes are breaking the organic nutrients down into a form the plant can take. Mix in amendments, let it sit a week or two, and it's ready. Soil that has cooked too long is "hot": too much plant-available food at once. The plant can show nitrogen toxicity (dark, glossy, clawing leaves) or nutrient burn (crispy tips). Before you blame the soil, check genetics; I've had one sensitive plant burn in a bag that eight others were fine in.

SECTION 03

Watering

It’s not how much. It’s how often, and whether the roots get air between waterings.

How to water

- Pour a little, then stick a finger an inch into the medium. Dry? Keep going.
- Water until it runs out the bottom. Aim for about 20% runoff so salts don’t build up.
- Then wait. Water again when it’s dry an inch down or the pot feels light when you lift it. In soil that’s usually every 2 to 4 days.
- If the top is still wet after three days, you’re watering too often or the pot isn’t draining.

	Overwatered	Underwatered
Leaves	Droopy but firm and plump. Curl under. Yellowing low on the plant.	Droopy and thin. Dry, papery, brittle. Yellowing with wilt.
Medium	Stays wet for days. Smells sour.	Bone dry, pulling away from the pot edge.
Why	Roots sitting in water get no oxygen, so they can’t take up food. Growth stalls.	The plant loses water through the leaves faster than dry roots can replace it.
Usual cause	Small plant in a huge pot. No drainage. Dense medium. Watering on a schedule instead of by feel.	Forgetting. Hot room. Small pot for a big plant. Being so scared of overwatering you go too far.
Fix	Let it dry out properly. Add perlite next time. More drainage holes, fabric pots, start seedlings in small pots and pot up.	Water thoroughly until runoff, then build a rhythm. Set a reminder. Lift the pot daily until you know its weight.

Pot size matters

A seedling in a five-gallon pot can’t drink what you give it and sits in wet soil for a week. A big plant in a one-gallon drinks it dry in a day and you end up watering constantly. Start small, pot up as roots fill the container.

SECTION 04

pH

If pH is out of range, nutrients lock out even when they’re in the pot. A lot of “deficiencies” are really this.

Medium	Keep pH between	What to measure
Soil	6.0 and 7.0	The runoff. What comes out the bottom tells you what the soil is doing; the water going in doesn’t.
Coco, soilless, hydro	5.5 and 6.5	The nutrient solution going in. Coco buffers, so runoff reads high; ignore it. I set every feed to 5.8.

These are general ranges to stay in, not hard lines. Some growers run outside of them without issues. Use them as the starting point and read the plant.

The tell

Tan, bronze or brown spots and patches spreading on leaves. Root rot can look similar, so rule pH out first. Damaged leaves don’t recover; new growth does, and that’s how you know the fix worked.

Testing and adjusting

- A digital pH pen is worth it. Strips and drops work but they’re rough. Keep distilled water for rinsing the probe.
- Go small and re-test. Tap water holds pH steadier than RO or distilled, which swing easily.
- A range is the point, not one number. Different nutrients are taken up best at slightly different pH, so a little drift inside the range is fine.

SECTION 05

Reusing soil

I ran the same soil eight times. Here’s what I learned when I finally tested it.

Reusing soil works, and it saves money. But it builds up what you put in and what the water brings. After eight runs I had the soil tested. It came back very high in chloride and very high in nitrates. Not a deficiency, an excess. So I flushed every container, then went back in with a reduced dose of my base nutrient and kept using it.

- **Test it.** A soil test is cheap compared to a stalled run. Do one every few cycles.
- **Flush when the numbers say so,** not on a schedule and not because a PPM reading scared you.
- **Feed lighter the first run after a flush.** The soil still has a lot in it.
- **Watch the water you use.** Chloride builds up from tap water over many runs.
- **Rebuild the biology.** Fresh amendments, let it cook a week or two, then plant.

One more tool

A cheap soil moisture meter. In a lighter mix I run 40 to 50% at the probe and the plants love it, which alarmed me at first coming from heavy soil. The number that matters is the one your plants are happy at, so learn what yours looks like and water to that.

Where to go next

- The light, environment and feeding numbers I run, in one place → mrgrowit.com/grow-pack
- The gear I actually use → mrgrowit.com/equipment
- My beginner book, *7 Steps To Grow Cannabis*, has the PPM and feeding ranges I use → mrgrowit.com/product-category/books
- The long versions on my site: soil mistakes · soil vs coco · pH