

# TORTOISE FEED GROWING KIT

## Instructions

1



Open the bag containing the soil and carefully pour a quarter of the bag into one of the seed trays provided.

2



Gently firm the soil with the palm of your hand, ensuring the surface of soil is even.

3



Open a sachet of seed and distribute the seed evenly over the surface of 1 small seed tray. Cover the seeds with a very thin layer of soil and firm down gently. Water very lightly but do not over water, the soil should be just slightly damp.

4



Place the small seed tray into the propagator base and cover the clear lid.

5



Place the complete propagator in a warm, well lit place such as a south facing window, conservatory or (in warm weather) a bright, sheltered position outside. Once the seeds start to grow, turn the tray each day to ensure even growth.

6



Water as needed to keep the soil damp but do not wet. Once the seedlings fill the propagator then remove the lid and continue to water as needed. The weeds can be used at any time depending on the size of your tortoise and will reach a maximum of about 15-20cm tall before running out of nutrients in the soil.

7

To use, simply remove the small seed tray and place in your tortoise's enclosure so that they can graze the weeds. After the weed leaves have been eaten the trays can be returned to the propagator and will regrow and can be used again. Alternatively, you can harvest leaves from the weeds to mix with other food being offered.

8

To provide a constant supply of weeds, stagger the sowing of the seed trays so that they are ready for use at different times.

Not all wild plants are suitable for tortoises, indeed some are poisonous. The types selected for the ProRep tortoise weed seed mixture are tasty and nutritious favourites of all Mediterranean tortoises. The mix will typically contain\*:

Dandelion ( <i>Taraxacum officinale</i> )	Ribwort Plantain ( <i>Plantago lanceolata</i> )	White/Duth Clover ( <i>Trifolium repens</i> )
Smooth Hawk's-beard ( <i>Crepis capillaris</i> )	Common Mallow ( <i>Malva sylvestris</i> )	Red Clover ( <i>Trifolium pratense</i> )
Nipplewort ( <i>Lapsana communis</i> )	Musk Mallow ( <i>Malva moschata</i> )	Common Vetch ( <i>Vicia sativa</i> )
Chicory ( <i>Cichorium intybus</i> )	Dwarf Mallow ( <i>Malva neglecta</i> )	Sainfoin ( <i>Onobrychis sativa</i> )
Smooth Sow Thistle ( <i>Sonchus oleraceus</i> )	Sheperd's purse ( <i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i> )	Creeping Bell-flower ( <i>Campanula rapunculoides</i> )
Great Plantain ( <i>Plantago major</i> )	Hairy Bittercress ( <i>Cardamine hirsuta</i> )	Field Blindweed ( <i>Taraxacum officinale</i> )
Hoary Plantain ( <i>Plantago media</i> )	Wavy Bittercress ( <i>Cardamine flexuosa</i> )	Hedge Mustard ( <i>Sisymbrium officinale</i> )

\*The mixture may vary depending on availability

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## 1. Seed viability

The weed seeds have a long life and are packed in sealed, moisture resistant packs to maximise their life. We regularly grow the seeds to ensure that batches have a high germination rate at all times. Once exposed to the air then the seeds can deteriorate and if the seed pack has been damaged in any way then this can cause the germination rate to drop.

## 2. Sowing the seeds

Many weed seeds are very tiny and will not germinate and grow successfully if planted too deep. The seeds should be sprinkled onto the soil surface and then barely covered with a very thin (1-2mm) of soil. If they are to be germinated inside the propagator then you do not even need to cover them, simply press into the soil surface with dry hands before watering.

## 3. Watering

This is possibly the most critical part of the seed care during germination, and the normal reason for germination failure. The soil that the seeds are grown in is a loam based soil. This is lower in nutrients than potting composts and so avoids rapid growth of the weeds, which would lead to plants that are very soft and tender (rather than nice tough weeds you are trying to produce), with a low nutrient content.

The down side of this soil however is that it waterlogs more easily and once this happens then the seeds will die before germinating. Once the seeds are sown then the soil only needs to be watered very lightly. This wets the surface layer of the soil, which is where the seeds are positioned, and gives them plenty of moisture to grow. If the soil surface looks dry then it can be watered again but in a propagator the soil will usually remain moist until the seeds have germinated. The best way to water the soil is with a fine rose on a watering can, or with a sprayer. If water starts to drip out of the holes in the bottom of the seed tray then the soil is close to being waterlogged and no more water should be added.

Once the weeds start to grow then the watering is best done by pouring a little water into the propagator tray so that it is drawn up into the soil. If there is water in the propagator tray all the time then the soil will get too wet, so it is best to water it little and often, if the soil is damp then don't water! Remember, while the propagator lid is in place then little water is lost from inside the propagator. Water vapour given off by the plants condenses on the inside of the lid and drips back into the tray, so the level of watering is much lower than you might expect.

## 4. Light

The weeds need as much light as possible, without being in direct sunlight for long periods which can cause overheating. A sunny windowsill, conservatory or greenhouse will all work well, but if grown on a windowsill then the tray should be turned daily to ensure even growth.

## 5. Warmth

The seeds will grow in a wide range of temperatures. From 10°C right up to 25°C, lower temperatures will cause much slower germination, while high temperatures increase the risk of fungal disease.

## 6. Other factors

It is a good idea to open the propagator every day for a few seconds to allow some fresh air in. This helps stop fungal diseases which can cause seedlings to "damp off" (this is when the stems rot and the seedling falls over and dies). Fungal problems with the seedlings pose no risk to a tortoise or other reptile, but means that fewer weeds are produced.

Hopefully these growing hints will help ensure a successful crop. If you have any concerns or need any further assistance the please contact the Pro Rep customer services team at [sales@pro-rep.co.uk](mailto:sales@pro-rep.co.uk).

