SOUTH COAST ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY

Riverton Organic Growers Fact Sheet | www.sces.org.nz

SEED BALLS

The use of seed balls as a method of recreating native habitat in New Zealand is both innovative and exciting. Here in Southland, where trials with seeds of indigenous plants are under way, there is much interest from environmental organizations and individuals wishing to accelerate the process of habitat creation.

The method is being used in other countries as an effective tool for re-vegetation of degraded landscapes, particularly in semi-arid areas. Trials there have shown that the process is simple anD effective and can involve a whole range of people, from the very young to the elderly.

How to make Seed Balls

Seed Balls are easy to make using materials you can find yourself, the process is similar to making chocolate truffles! Collect some clay, compost and seeds.

Mix them in the proportion:
One of seeds
Three of compost
Five of clay

SEEDS

Collect seeds from as close as possible to the proposed restoration site. Clean and store each type of seed according to its needs. Some seeds, such as manuka, need to be dried and stored in a dark place. Pittosporum seeds, on the other hand, have to be seperated from their sticky coating before use.

Wash and rub the seed pods in detergent to seperate the seeds and then rinse them well. Poroporo need to be treated like tomatoes, that is, set out to ripen until squishy, mushed into a container of water, left to stand and ferment slightly then pulped by hand to seperate seed from flesh.

There are many good manuals describing the pre-treatment of New Zealand seeds. Common sense will ensure that you succeed. Once you have a good supply of seed, you can mix them together in combinations such as you would find naturally.

COMPOST

Compost collected from beneath the sorts of trees that you plan to grow serves two purposes. The surrounding seeds will use nutrients from the compost to grow, once they have exhausted their own reserves.

At the same time, mycorrhiza* which will be found as spores or fragments in the compost, will 'partner up' with the growing seed and begin its beneficial association with the plant.

These fungi appear to be essential to the successful establishment of native plants. The compost needs to be sieved to remove stalks and leaves, then dried in a shaded place.

CLAY

The most suitable clay is red terracotta clay, collected from a site free of weed seed. Often, digging deep will ensure that no unwanted seeds become part of the mix! The clay needs to be dried and ground finely to ensure a lump free mixture. Two bricks can serve as an effective grinder.

Other clays, the blues and the whites are not suitable for this process, as they contain minerals, which interfere with the growth of the seedlings.

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SEED BALLS

Here is how to mix them

Take the seeds and the compost and mix until the seeds are coated. Add the powdered clay and mix the whole lot together. Next add a little water, until the mixture is like a dough. Be careful not to use too much water.

Pinch off a small amount of the mix, compress it between your fingers then roll it between the palms of your hands. The seed ball should be the size of a marble and should feel 'sound'.

As you roll more and more seed balls, set them out in a shaded place to dry. They will be ready in a few days and can be dispersed from that time on.

Growing Seeds balls

Seed balls don't get planted. They are simply scattered about the site you wish to re-vegetate. They can be thrown, rolled, fired from a slingshot or dropped from a helicopter! Children love to do this work and elderly people find it rewarding to be able to take part in a project that doesn't backbreaking digging! The most suitable sites for 'seed balling' are those free from thick grasses:

Exposed soil, beneath exotic trees, broom and gorse, in pine forests, amongst native nurse plants, such as manuka, on beach foreshores, amongst harakiki and so on.

There is no need to water seed balls. They will absorb moisture from the ground, the dew and the rain and will sprout when the conditions are right. Many seeds will grow from a single seed ball and the most suited plant to the micro-conditions of that site will prevail.

Seed Balls are easy to make, light to transport and simple to apply. They ensure a very high strike rate, protect seeds from birds and insects and can be spread in very difficult areas. They provide an opportunity for an enjoyable community activity and they don't cost anything!

Credit

Thank you to Adam Guyton for supplying this information. Details on the making of seed ball, the history of their use and projects underway around the world using the method can be found at www.seedballs.com