

Disadvantages

- initial costs are high
- knowledge is needed to operate the system
- beneficial soil life is absent
- plants react fast to irrigation mistakes

Propagation in Rockwool.

There are a wide range of plugs or small cubes available that can be used for seed germination, rooting cuttings or weaning micropropagated plantlets.

Once the seedlings/cuttings are established they can be transferred into larger rockwool cubes (7.5 x 7.5cm) and later onto the final growing slab (100 -120cm long, 15 - 30cm wide). Under no circumstances should seedlings or cuttings be transferred from a soil/peat based growing medium into rockwool since rotting of your plants would be inevitable.



Peppers growing in Rockwool plugs

critical role in future long-duration missions and will allow humans to colonise many faraway planets? There may be no little green men on Mars, but some day soon, there will be at least a requirement for someone with 'green fingers'!

Further reading

Patrick Moore, *Patrick Moore on Mars*, Cassell, 1998, ISBN 0-304-35069-9.

Denis Smith, *Grower Manual 2: Growing in Rockwool*, Nexus Media, 1998, ISBN 1-899372-067.

Most vegetable crops will need some form of support - a piece of string attached to the roof will be sufficient. Make sure that your greenhouse's structure can cope with the additional weight!

Once the crop has produced all its long awaited fruits and is finally discarded, the rockwool material can be dried and either thrown away or shredded and re-used in potting compost - the latter being a more environmentally-friendly approach.

And finally...

In space, aboard the Mir Space Station, dwarf wheat has already been grown in a hydroponics system similar to the one successfully used on Earth.

Surely, this technique will have a

Beagle 2

A Lander for Mars



A series of NASA missions to Mars are planned to culminate in the return to Earth of martian rocks in 2008 and eventually to put a man on Mars, realistically not before the second decade of the next century. Before this Britain will play a major part in martian exploration and will conduct experiments on the planet to answer the question 'is there, or was there, life on Mars?'

In June 2003 the European Space Agency (ESA) will launch the Mars Express mission. As the spacecraft reaches Mars, a small lander will be ejected from the main craft and head to the surface of the planet. A safe landing will be ensured by means of parachutes and airbags. The projected landing date is Boxing Day 2003 and the location will be a dried-up valley, the type of place most likely to have supported (microbial) life in the past. The lander is named Beagle 2 after the ship HMS Beagle which carried Charles Darwin on his voyage of discovery and led to the theories of evolution which changed our thinking about life on Earth. Beagle 2 will carry out a series of scientific experiments, notably to search for evidence of past and present life and to investigate whether conditions appropriate to life exist.

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The MPM Group, Lamberhurst, Kent

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Interested? why not come along to one of our 'Hydroponic Workshops' which are planned for the summer.

Hadlow College also offers a wide range of other courses for amateur and professional horticulturalists.

For details please call The Course Enquiry Unit
FREE on 0500 551434

