How to Grow Pseudolithos (and other Asclepiads) from Seed | Notes from a Boston Grower

Written by @globular_kev | January 21, 2026

Introduction

Pseudolithos are easily one of my favorite genuses of plants. Since I began my plant journey 2 years ago, I have become deeply obsessed with these succulent plants with lizard-like skin and stunning fleshy flowers that smell like rotten meat.

7 month old Pseudolithos Cubiformis (Left) and 7 month old Pseudolithos Mccoyi Flowering (Right)

Pseudolithos have a reputation of being difficult plants to keep alive - a common sentiment is that they can "turn into an expensive pile of mush overnight". Contrary to this, I have found that both adults and seedlings are quite easy to care for, and respond very well to a stable environment and care schedule. In this article, I will detail my personal method that I have used to successfully grow Pseudolithos, Whitesloanea, Echidnopsis, and Hoodia from seed. My record from seed to flower is 7 months with Pseudolithos Mccoyi.

Seed Preparation

I have found that Pseudolithos seeds do not require any sort of special treatment - there is no need for seed soaking, scarification, cold stratification, etc. Unlike plants that rely on edible fruit to aid in seed dispersion, Pseudolithos seeds explode out of a pod and have puffs that carry them in the wind.

(Above) Pseudolithos Mccoyi with an exploded seed pod

Substrate

The soil composition is probably one of the most important aspects to growing Pseudolithos from seed. They prefer a gritty, fine grain mineral substrate for germination and seedling stages. My soil recipe is included below. Zeolite makes an excellent top dressing as its color changes depending on wetness, which provides a great visual indicator on when the soil has begun to dry out.

For beneficial microbes, I use Great White Mycorrhizae. I just add a dash of the powder and mix it into the soil. I don't usually measure a specific amount.

This soil mix is approximately 80-90% inorganic to organic, since the cactus and succulent soil I use is roughly 40-50% inorganic by volume.

Soil Composition		
Description	**Quantity**	**Photo**
Cactus and Succulent Soil (sifted and sterilized)	1/4 Part	
Pumice (1/32" - 1/8")	1/4 Part	
Lava Rock (1/16" to 3/16")	1/4 Part	
Granular Zeolite (1.4 mm)	1/8 Part	
Course Sand (sifted)	1/8 Part	

Other Soil Amendments	
Top Dressing	Granular Zeolite 
Microbes	Great White Myco 

Sowing the Seeds

1. Mix your soil and fill your pot.
2. Saturate your soil by soaking the pot in distilled water.
3. (Optional) Spray the top of the substrate with a sterilizing solution such as 3% Hydrogen Peroxide.
4. Place the seeds on top of your layer of top dressing (if you are using top dressing). Do not bury the seed, but press it in so it is secure.
    a. For sowing, I like to pack the seeds pretty tightly into a container. In a 3 inch pot, I will generally fit 20-25 seeds. Pseudolithos in general appreciate being slightly underpotted - this also helps prevent overwatering.

5. (Optional) Spray the top of the seeds with a sterilizing solution such as 3% Hydrogen Peroxide.
6. Cover the seeds with a dome or baggie to keep the humidity high.
7. Move your seedlings to your germination environment.

Environment

For germination and the first few months, I try to maintain the following conditions:

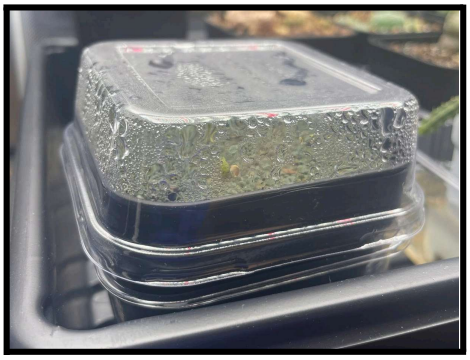
Light Levels	12000 - 14000 [lux] using grow lights
Photoperiod	12-13 hours
Temperature	68-80F Temperature Range using Heat Mat
Airflow	Light airflow from a grow-room fan

Germination and Post-Germination

Hardening Off

Pseudolithos seeds will generally germinate pretty quickly, between 7-14 days. Do not begin to consider hardening off the seedlings until you are happy with the germination rate. But do not wait too long either.

Once enough of the seedlings have germinated, you can begin to harden them off. Pseudolithos and other asclepiads do not need to be kept in humidity for an extended period, as it invites mold and potentially rot. Seedlings can be hardened off rather rapidly (e.g. within the span of 1-2 weeks), and do not appear to be affected by the shock of humidity change. In general, Pseudolithos should be completely hardened off by 2-4 weeks from germination.



Watering and Fertilizing

Earlier on, Pseudolithos seedlings appreciate a bit more water to give them some growing momentum. For their very first two waterings post-germination, water when you notice that the top layer of soil has dried off. Personally, I know this is when the zeolite top dressing turns light in color. I provide a generous top-watering for these first two waterings.

From this point on, I water once the soil has mostly or completely dried, which I know based on the weight of the pot. I bottom-water until the soil is fully saturated. With my specific controlled growing environment, I water per this criterion every 10-14 days.

Pseudolithos respond very well to fertilizer. I like to use Espoma Cactus and Succulent fertilizer at the recommended dilution of 2 tsp / quart, every 3-4 waterings.

Date	Cubiformis Dragon	
05-17-25	-	sowed
05-20-25		
05-21-25		
05-23-25		
05-25-25		
05-28-25		
05-29-25		
05-30-25		
06-01-25	291	-
06-03-25	277	distilled
06-04-25		
06-07-25		
06-08-25		
06-09-25	281	-
06-11-25	273	Distilled
06-15-25	298	-
06-17-25	277	
06-18-25	273	soak
06-21-25		
06-23-25		
06-24-25		
06-25-25	271	-
06-28-25	258	Epsoma

Example of my water schedule for the first month and a half

Other Notes and Aftercare

The true 'leaves' of the seedlings will emerge fairly quickly. Sometimes, seedling development will stall, but they will resume growth when they feel like it.

Pseudolithos mccoyi true "leaves" emerging

After an appreciable amount of growth has occurred, the seedlings can be moved to higher light. In general, I move my Pseudolithos seedlings to 16-18000 [lux] after roughly a month from germination. Seedlings will not need to be repotted until the pot begins to look overcrowded.

Afterword

This concludes my guide on growing Pseudolithos from seed - hopefully it makes these lumpy plants feel less intimidating! Below are a selection of photos of some of my seedlings during their growing process.

Whitesloanea Crassa, Pseudolithos Cubiformis, Hoodia Juttae