

GROWING GUIDE FOR ONIONS

Binomial Name:	Allium
Varieties:	Purple / Red Storage, Tropeana Lunga, Yellow of Parma, Jaune Paille Des Vertus, Bianca Di Maggio, Crimson Forest Bunching, He Shi Ko Bunching
Start:	Seeds or seedlings
Germination:	4 - 5 days, 7°C to 35°C
Seed Life (viability):	1 year
Soil:	Well drained, high fertility
Sunlight:	Full sun
Sow Seeds:	1 cm apart
Transplant Seedlings:	10 cm apart
Ave. Days to Harvest:	65 to 75
Good Companions:	Beetroot, carrot, chamomile, cucumber, dill, kohlrabi, lettuce, pepper, savory, strawberry, yarrow, zucchini
Bad Companions:	Beans, leek, parsley, parsnip, peas, potato, tomato

Sowing & Planting:

Whether harvested early for bunching onions/scallions (green or 'spring' onions), for summer meals or for winter storage, onions need rich, well-drained soil and good weed control. Tightly spaced green onions fit well in ornamental plantings. Onions require plentiful, even moisture for good yields.

Onions can be direct-seeded, grown from seedlings started inside, or from sets (small bulbs about 1 cm in diameter grown from seed the previous season). Choose a weed-free, well-drained location. Raised beds are ideal.

Onions are good for intercropping with other garden plants, especially early-maturing spring greens. Do not plant where other onion family crops have been grown in the past 3 years. Direct-seeding in the garden may not allow enough time for long-season varieties to mature but is fine for shorter-season varieties or for bunching onions/scallions - green onions harvested before the bulb forms.

Direct-seed in early spring when the soil reaches 10°C. Plant seed 0.5 cm deep, 1 cm apart, in rows 30 to 45 cm apart. Thin to 10 cm spacing's for large bulbs, 5 cm spacing's for smaller bulbs but higher yields, or 3 cm spacing's for scallions.

Start transplants inside about 8 to 10 weeks before last frost date. Plant 4 or 5 seeds in each cell, or sow in flats 0.5 cm deep and 1 cm apart. If tops grow too tall and begin to droop, trim back to about 8 cm tall with scissors. After hardening off, transplant 2 to 4 weeks before last frost date. Space 10 cm apart for large bulbs, 5 cm apart for smaller bulbs, or 3 cm apart for scallions.

From sets: Choose bulbs no larger than 2 cm in diameter. Large bulbs are more prone to bolting. Plant sets about 3 cm deep 2 to 4 weeks before last frost date. Space 10 cm apart for large bulbs or 5 cm apart for smaller bulbs.

Growing:

Onions have shallow root systems and need consistent moisture and good weed control. Water weekly if the weather is dry and mulch well to retain moisture and suppress weeds. Onions usually do not flower unless grown from sets that are too large (more than 1 to 2 cm in diameter) or if young plants (direct seeded or transplanted) are stressed by abnormally cold weather.

Harvesting:

You can always tell when onions have stopped growing. The leaves will lose their colour, weaken at the top of the bulb and flop over. Each year a few new gardeners watch the leaves die and wonder "What's wrong?" There's nothing wrong, it's just nature's plan. The leaves' job is done - they've put the last of their energy into the bulbs. Let most of your onion tops fall over by themselves - maybe 80% or 90% of them - then bend over the rest of the tops. Once they're down, leave the bulbs in the ground for another 10 days to two weeks to mature fully.

It's not good to leave the onions in the ground for longer than two weeks after the tops die because they become open to organisms that can cause rot in storage, or they might even start growing again.

Pull your onions up on a sunny day if you can and let them sit in the sun for another day or so to dry (in hot climates this usually takes just a few hours). This drying kills the root system at the bottom of each bulb. The roots will be like little brittle wires when they're dry. Picking the right day to pull the onions can determine how well the onions will keep. If you harvest them after some rainy weather they'll have a lot more moisture in them and won't dry out as well.

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