

How to Grow Onions

Onions are mostly a biennial plant, with vegetative growth the first year, then blooming in the second; however, some perennial varieties do exist. They belong to the *allium* family, along with shallots, garlic, leeks and chives.

Onions prefer:

Light:	Full sun
Soil:	Well drained loam
Fertility:	Medium
pH of:	6.0-6.5
Temperature:	Temperature tolerant-will germinate in temps of 65-85 degrees
Moisture:	Moderate
Fertilizer:	Prefer a nitrogen based fertilizer

There are three ways to start growing onions: sets, direct seeding and transplanting. Sets are onions that were planted from seed last year; this is the most common way of starting onions. When buying sets, look for ones that are firm, marble sized and have not sprouted. Sets will tolerate light frost, so you can plant them outside when the temperature reached 48 degrees (usually around mid April). They should be planted pointed end up, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 2" below the soil. For larger onions, plant them 3-4" apart. It should be noted that onions from sets do not store as well as those from seedlings.

Starting onions from transplants will give you bigger onions for the fall. If you are starting them yourself, start them indoors 8-12 weeks before transplanting them outside (if you plan on planting in May, start the seeds in February). The seeds should be planted $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep, and must be hardened off before planted outside. Expose them to the outdoors gradually so they don't go into shock. Plant them 4" apart, just deep enough so that they stay put in the soil. Watering is crucial to the onion formation, so be sure to water 1" a week.

Direct seeding is the most difficult to do, as our season is so short. For this reason, it is best for growing green onions (scallions). The seeds should be placed in a sunny, well-drained area, covered with $\frac{1}{2}$ " of soil, and should be harvested when the white part of the plant is about $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick.

There is no set harvest time for onions, as they can be eaten at any stage in their growth. They are ripe when $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ of the tops have fallen over, and the bulbs have a papery skin on them. After pulled from the ground, they should be "cured" in a warm, well circulated place out of the outdoors for about two weeks. You will know when they are ready from the dry, shrunken neck and dry skin. Because the onions will start to sprout at over 40 degrees, the recommended storing temperature is 32 degrees.

