



A GUIDE TO GROWING ONIONS

Onions are a fun vegetable to plant, and great for kids to help out with. Onions are relatives of leeks, garlic, chives, and shallots and are prized for their unique taste and medicinal qualities. They have been utilized for millenia, as evidence shows on Egyptian tombs and other historical records. Native to central Asia, we can now find onions and their relatives in any store, market, and restaurant.

PLANTING

Onions are easiest to grow as transplants. They can be grown from seed; however their long maturity time may mean you only end up with pearl-sized harvests. Plant transplants anytime in late winter/early spring as soon as the soil can be worked. Prepare the soil to be loose, crumbly, and easily drained. Onions prefer slightly acidic soil. Plant transplants by either digging individual holes 1" deep (a pencil works great for this) or by digging a 1" deep trench. If larger bulbs are desired, space out plants 4" apart; otherwise, a 2" spacing will allow green onions to be harvested while keeping others to mature. If seeding, plant at ½" deep; broadcasting will allow green onions to be harvested quickly. Water immediately upon planting. Some gardeners also apply a fertilizer at planting, such as a 10-20-10. Do this in a trench 6" away from the actual onion plants.

MAINTENANCE

It will be important to keep the area around your new plants relatively weed-free. Using a hook tool or weeding by hand will protect the tender roots from being damaged. Regular watering will help to form good-



sized bulbs. Since onions have shallow roots, never let the soil dry out and become cracked at the base of the plant. If the leaves become yellowish, it may be a sign of over watering, so back off slightly. You can also use a light straw mulch around the plant to keep down weeds and maintain moisture. The critical time for watering is just as the bulbs mature. If you have applied fertilizer during plant growth, stop once the bulbs mature and crack through the soil; this is near the harvest time (check the maturity date to be sure). Once the green tops have dried and fall over, stop watering.

HARVEST

Harvest the onions when the tops have fallen over. If you chose to store them, they should be air-cured for a few days. Leave the tops on, and allow them to dry all the way to the onion bulb. At this point, you can clip off the roots and tops and then store the onions in a cool, dry place, preferably in mesh bags or netting (as seen in the grocery store). Sweet onions will perish faster than more pungent ones, so use those first.

DAY LENGTH

Onions are categorized as long-day, short-day, or intermediate. This means, in order to form the edible bulb, certain varieties will require specific day lengths during the bulb formation time. In the Midwest, the ideal for our day lengths is intermediate, which requires 12-14 hours of daylight to trigger bulb formation. Long-day varieties are great for the north, since with an increase in latitude comes an increase in summer day lengths. Short-days work best for the south.