

Onions (and Scallions) – Growing from Sets

There are three essential facts to keep in mind when growing bulbing onions.

- 1) Bulb will never be larger than its top.
- 2) Top completely stops growing once bulb begins forming. So, grow the tops as big as you can as fast as you can.
- 3) Grow varieties adapted to your zone. Change in length of day instructs or triggers the plant to change from growing a top to making a bulb.

Red Wethersfield - Large, flattened globe with very thin, reddish-purple skin. The white flesh is very firm and tinged with pink or purple highlights. Fine, strong flavor; vigorous.

White Ebenezer - Medium-sized, flat onion. Translucent white skins (unnoticeable) so there is less waste preparing them. Fine grained flesh, popular for pickling. Excellent keeper. Young plants used as scallions.

Yellow Stuttgart - Flattened onion with bronze-yellow skin. Mild, sweet-flavored, fast-growing. Young plants make good scallions.

SOIL PREPARATION: Onions demand light, loose soil and do best in sandy loam. Amend heavier soil with Loam Builder or Forest Mulch Plus. The important thing is to encourage onions to grow tops as rapidly as possible. This means a lot of fertilizer early on. Maxsea 16-16-16 can be used as a foliar or soil, liquid application. Onions have coarse, small root systems so place fertilizer close to the plants and side dress/mulch or foliar feed them. Once bulbing begins, there is no point fertilizing them anymore; the bulb's size is already determined by the size of the top.

PLANTING: The easiest way to harvest the earliest possible scallions is to plant sets in the fall and let them overwinter. For larger bulbs, plant sets in late winter or early spring. In mid-summer, many plants started from sets in the fall will “bolt”, producing seed stalks rather than a good bulb.

Scallions: Plant sets 1 ½ to 2 inches deep and 2 inches apart since they need less space than onions. **Onions:** Plant 1 ½ to 2 inches deep, 6 inches apart and rows a foot apart. Onion bulbs need more space in order to grow large since they compete for water and food.

WATERING: Onions have small, inefficient root systems and require moist soil. Keep them consistently watered. When the plants approach maturity, their bulbs stop enlarging and begin to form skins. When this happens, withhold further irrigation and hope it does not rain much. Ideally, the bulbs will mature in very dry soil. This helps the skins to cure and the bulbs to store better.

HARVEST and STORAGE: After most of the tops have “gone down”, carefully lift the bulbs, ideally with a digging fork. Allow them to lie in the sun for a day or so then move to a well-ventilated area in a shadier location. The bulbs should cure from 3 weeks to 2 months, depending on the humidity and amount of air circulation. Curing is complete once the skin around the neck closes tight. After curing, the roots and leaf remnants can be trimmed.

Thanks to Irish Eyes, Inc. for providing this information



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