

Onions can be planted while the air and ground temperatures are still cool, if using 'sets' or transplants. Onion seeds require warm soil to germinate. If you wait until the soil in your garden is warm enough to direct seed onions, the remainder of our growing season here is not long enough to produce onions of any size. Planting onion sets is a very popular alternative. Do not plant the bulb deeply, leaving the very tip at ground level is usually deep enough. Onions grow as much, if not more, above ground, as underground.

Starting your own seeds indoors, or purchasing onion transplants from a grower, then transplanting the young onions to your garden is another viable option. Most onions (from seed) require 100-plus days to mature in your garden from time of transplant. Transplants should be at least 8 weeks old.

Onions prefer a slightly acidic soil, and a sunny location, but are not particularly fussy. They are however heavy feeders, and the use of a high-phosphorous fertilizer (example 10-20-10) at planting time (to encourage early, healthy, root growth) may be beneficial. Some gardeners believe that side dressing with a high nitrogen fertilizer, once the onions are growing, is also beneficial. Space your onion sets or transplants 4-6 inches (10-15 cm) apart, in soil that has been loosened (compacted soil will stunt and deform bulb growth). Some gardeners like to plant onions closer together, then, pull every second one for use in salads as soon as the lettuce is ready! – just be sure that those left to mature have sufficient room.

Onions have shallow roots, and need to grow consistently, with no check in their growth. For this reason it is important to keep them regularly watered, never allowing the roots to completely dry out. This is possibly the most important point to keep in mind for a successful onion harvest.

Do not allow your onions to flower. Once the flower appears, the onion should be pulled, as the bulb will not grow any larger. The exception here, being the 'multipliers' which are left in the ground year-round, (mulch in the winter) and are pulled whenever an onion is required. These typically do not grow large, but if you have a spot to grow these, they do provide a steady supply all Summer and Fall. Onions are ready to harvest when the majority of the tops have begun to droop. At about this stage...just as the first ones show signs of drooping, some gardeners like to bend the 'greens' right over. Withhold extra water at this point. When harvesting for storage, pull the onions out and allow them to dry outdoors (weather permitting) for a couple of days in a sunny, dry spot. Then hang in a well ventilated location for 2-3 weeks before storing in breathable net or burlap bags.

True 'green' or 'bunching' onions are harvested before they develop bulbs, and even if left in the garden, will not produce large bulbs. Allowing them to stay in the garden too long after maturing (typically around 60-70 days) may cause the 'greens' to not be as tender.

Leeks require a long growing season as well (similar to onions, over 100 days from transplant) and are best transplanted into your garden as a young plant (at least 5 weeks old). Most gardeners like to blanch the stem to produce a long 'white' length. Try planting your transplants into holes at the bottom of a 6-inch (15 cm) deep trench, then gradually fill the trench in as the leek grows, even hilling dirt up as you approach harvest time. Be careful not to hill dirt into the leaves, - this may cause disease or rot.

Spring Garlic can also be planted early in the season... a topic for another day!

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