



Growing Onions

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Onions are Cool Crops

In order to keep good flavour, onions need to germinate and mature before it gets too hot in the summer. So you can either grow them from seeds indoors starting in February giving them two months start or you can plant seeds directly in the garden as soon as the ground can be worked but they will only give you spring onions by harvest. The third option is to plant sets in early spring and they will mature as larger onion bulbs by harvest. You can also grow onions in containers.

Planting

If you are planting indoors, choose early maturing varieties. Plant in flats in a growing medium then transplant about one inch apart and plant them in the garden in April. If you are planting seeds outdoors, plant them in multiple rows then thin to 2 inches apart. This way you can pull every other one as scallions later and the bulbs that are left will have enough room. It is a good idea to plant onions with your carrots so that you can deter the carrot fly.

Varieties to Plant

You can find more varieties of onions as seeds because the ones sold as sets are only those that can withstand storage over the winter. The other advantage, of course, is that the seeds are less expensive. Veseys sells a number of varieties as seeds and sets including yellow skinned ones and red ones that store well as well as white skinned ones that do not store well.

Harvesting and Storage

When the tops fall over, harvest is coming soon. You should wait until the tops are brown. If you want them all to mature at the same time, you can always knock over a few of the stragglers. For the ones started indoors in February, this should be about the end of July. The ones started as sets should be ready by August. If the weather is good, you can dry them in the sun for a couple of days, then move them to a dry, warm place for 4 to 6 weeks, then into a cool ventilated space for the winter. The onions with the thinner stalks store best, so it is best to eat the fat-stemmed ones. Cut the stems off about an inch long.

Problems you Might Encounter

Onions are usually insect and disease free but you might encounter onion maggots particularly in moist summers or thrips.

Learn more about growing onions from the Cornell University site www.gardening.cornell.edu >

Learn more about onions on Wikipedia >