



**CORNELL
COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION OF
ONEIDA COUNTY**

HOME GROWN FACTS

121 Second Street Oriskany, NY 13424-9799
(315) 736-3394 or (315) 337-2531 FAX: (315) 736-2580

GROWING ONIONS

Also known as scallions, bunching onions, green onions



Whether harvested early for scallions (green onions), for summer meals, or winter storage, onions need rich, well-drained soil and good weed control. Tightly spaced green onions fit well in ornamental plantings.

Site Characteristics

Sunlight:

- full sun

Soil conditions:

- requires well-drained soil
- requires high fertility

Well-drained, rich soil, high in organic matter, neutral pH. Optimum pH is 6.2 to 6.8. Requires plentiful, even moisture for good yields.

Plant Traits

Lifecycle: annual

Biennial grown as annual.

Ease-of-care: moderately difficult

Easy if you have rich well-drained soil and good weed control.

Height: 1 to 3 feet

Spread: 0.5 to 1 feet

Bloom time: mid-summer

Usually does not flower unless grown from sets that are too large (more than $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter), or young plants (direct seeded or transplanted) are stressed by abnormally cold weather.

Foliage color: medium green

Foliage texture: medium

Shape: upright

Tolerates:

- Frost

Growing Information

How to plant:

Propagate by seed - To grow your own onion sets, sow seeds thickly in a block in midsummer. About 2 months after planting, roll down the tops, forcing the plants to form small bulbs. (Those about the size of a dime work best.) After tops dry, clip them off, leaving about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of stem. Cure and store in a cool, dry place as you would onions for eating. Plant your sets the following spring.

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

Germination temperature: 45 F to 95 F

Days to emergence: 4 to 5

Seed can be saved 1 year. - Longer if stored properly in cool, dry location.

Maintenance and care:

Can be direct-seeded, grown from transplants started inside, or from sets -- small bulbs about ½-inch in diameter grown from seed the previous season.

Choose a weed-free, well-drained location. Raised beds are ideal. Onions are good for intercropping with other garden plants, especially early-maturing spring greens. Do not plant where other onion family crops have been grown in the past 3 years.

Direct-seeding in the garden may not allow enough time for long-season varieties to mature, but is fine for shorter-season varieties or for scallions - onions harvested before the bulb forms.

Direct-seed in spring when the soil reaches 50 F. Plant seed ¼ inch deep, ½ inch apart, in rows 12 to 18 inches apart. Thin to 4-inch spacings for large bulbs, 2-inch spacings for smaller bulbs but higher yields, or 1-inch spacings for scallions.

Start transplants inside about 8 to 10 weeks before last frost date. Plant 4 or 5 seeds in each cell, or seed in flats ¼ inch deep and ½ inch apart. If tops grow too tall and begin to droop, trim back to about 3 inches tall with scissors. After hardening off, transplant 2 to 4 weeks before last frost date. Space 4 inches apart for large bulbs, 2 inches apart for smaller bulbs, or 1 inch apart for scallions.

From sets: Choose bulbs no larger than ¾ inch in diameter. Large bulbs are more prone to bolting. Plant sets about 1 inch deep 2 to 4 weeks before last frost date. Space 4 inches apart for large bulbs or 2 inches apart for smaller bulbs.

Onions have shallow root systems and need consistent moisture and good weed control. Water weekly if weather is dry, and mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds.

Pests:

Onion maggot - Locate new plants in a part of the garden different from previous year's location. Use floating row covers to prevent infestations.

Thrips

Diseases:

Purple blotch (*Alternaria porri*) and Botrytis leaf blight - Avoid wetting foliage if possible. Water early in the day so above-ground plant parts will dry as quickly as possible. Avoid crowding plants. Allow space for air circulation. Eliminate weeds around plants and garden area to improve air circulation. Practice plant sanitation: when plants are not wet, carefully remove or discard affected plant parts. In autumn, rake and dispose of all fallen or diseased leaves and bulbs.

Varieties

Choose long-day varieties which need about 14 hours of light to form bulbs. Short-day varieties, such as the famous Vidalia onions, grow best in the South.

Spring-sown early varieties can be harvested just 60 to 80 days after planting. Storage varieties require 90 to 110 days to mature from direct seeding, and come in yellow, white and purple varieties. Sweet or milder varieties do not store well, and should be eaten soon after harvest. Pearl onions (sometimes called cocktail onions) have small bulbs (great for pickling) that mature in 60 to 70 days.

Green or bunching onions (sometimes called scallions) don't form bulbs. Harvest them for their greens and small blanched below-ground stem usually 65 to 75 days after direct seeding. Some are a different species altogether, *Allium fistulosum*.

Some varieties recommended for New York include:

From transplants (Not for long term storage):

Ailsa Craig

Bennie's Red

Candy

Red Sweet Spanish

Walla Walla (mild)

White Sweet Spanish

From seed (early-maturing):

Arsenal

Early Yellow Globe

Precedent

From seed or transplants (long-term storage):

Duration

Fortress

Mars

Redwing

Sets:

Stuttgarter

Green or Bunching:

Evergreen Hardy White

He-Shi-Ko

Long White Bunching

Southport White Bunching

Source: <http://explore.cornell.edu> 2006

This publication may contain pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly, some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold, and/or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office. **READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.**