

Onions & Shallots

Planting

Shallots and onions are in the same family and share many of the same characteristics. Shallot bulbs are smaller with a milder flavor than onions. Shallots grow by forming clumps of bulbs, whereas onions grow as individual bulbs. Regardless, both are grown the same way.

Sets

Onion and Shallot sets are tiny bulbs that were started from seed the year before. They should be about the size of a marble as larger sets don't adjust well and can bolt or split. As with all bulbs, the sets should be firm and healthy looking.

Sets can be planted early in the season, before the last frost. Soil should be dry and warmed up a bit. Plant onion sets pointed end up and cover with about 2" of soil. Depending on the mature size of your variety, space about 3-4" apart.

Transplants

Transplants generally result in larger onions than sets. You can buy transplants or start your own indoors from seed. Start onion seed about 8-12 weeks before your transplant date. Plant onion seed about ¼ - ½" deep. You can seed heavy and then thin at transplant time. Keep the soil moist. As the tops grow, keep them trimmed to about 4".

Transplants or onion seedlings will need to be hardened off before planting outdoors. Wait until all danger of frost has passed before planting. Don't bury transplants too deep. Plant the transplants close to the surface of the soil, spaced about 4" apart. After planting the sets it's a good idea to cover your crop with a protective netting to prevent them from being eaten by birds and insects. Critters love to grasp the protruding tips and yank them up!

Keep onions well-watered throughout the season. Regular watering is required to allow the bulbs to swell in size. "Water stressed" onions are stronger in flavor and more pungent so consider this when watering during summer months.

Harvesting

You can harvest onions and shallots at any stage. The onion plants you thin from a row can be used as green onions. Onion and shallot bulbs are ready when about half of the tops have fallen over.

Onion and shallot bulbs that remain in the ground until 50% or more of the green tops have fallen over will keep and store longer.

Once you see half the tops are down, gently coax the remaining leaves down, without breaking them from the bulb. Allow the bulbs to sit in the ground and cure for a couple of days before you lift them.

Digging bulbs is preferred to pulling them. Dig enough to loosen the remaining roots.

Shake and brush off any loose soil and let the bulbs finish curing in a warm, dry place with good air circulation. Leave the leaves on. You can use fresh onions at any time.

For storing onions and shallots, wait until the outside skins dry and the neck (where the leaves meet the bulbs) starts to shrivel. Store in a cool, dry location, like a basement. Onions and Shallots keep longer in cool temperatures but should not be allowed to freeze. Store in mesh type bags or by braiding the tops together and hanging.

Onions – Available Spring Only

Cippolini – Borettana – Often called summer mini onions, this variety has flattened spherical shaped bulbs that resemble rosy-bronze glossy buttons. The closer this onion is planted together the smaller the bulbs will be.

Red Candy – Medium eyed, deep red, globe shaped onion. Mild, sweet flavor. Best enjoyed raw in salads and sandwiches.

Red Torpedo – Italian heirloom variety known for its sweet, mild flavor, elongated shape, and deep reddish-purple skin. Best enjoyed fresh.

Ringmaster - White fleshed onion with milky white skins. The globe shaped bulbs are very large with crisp sweet flesh. This onion can be stored for up to five months.

Walla Walla - Large, teardrop shaped bulbs with light brown skin and mild white flesh. Known for its sweetness. Use fresh as has a short shelf life.

Yellow Spanish – Large fruit with yellow/brown skin. Easy to grow for beginning gardeners. Mild, sweet taste. Reliable producer.

Egyptian Walking Onion – Available Fall and Spring

These onions could be mistaken for a regular onion until around May when they began to grow a miniature version of itself on top of its stalk. These onions are called walking onions because the clusters of onions grow on top of the leaves and become top heavy enough to tip over and plant themselves into the ground. This cycle repeats making them appear to be walking across your garden. It's hardy to Zone 3 and stays green all winter. You can also pick and separate the bulblets and plant them throughout your garden for quicker spreading. Egyptian Walking Onions like full sun and loamy sandy soil.

Shallots – Available Fall and Spring

Holland Red - Purple-tinged white flesh with spicy, peppery rich flavor when cooked. Coppery red outer skin. Peels easily. Stores well.

Holland Yellow - Round bulbs with copper skin and creamy yellow flesh. Uniform in size and known to store well. Tender spicy raw flavor that mellows when cooked.

Revised 1.20.26