

Growing Onions

PREPARE

While the plants may appear dry, don't be alarmed; they're simply dormant. Don't worry if you can't plant them immediately, even if the roots and tips begin to dry out. The onions can live off the bulb for approximately three weeks.

Keep them in a well-ventilated, cool area until you can plant them. **DO NOT** put them in soil or water!!

Soil Preparation

Onions require full sun and good soil drainage. Choose a location that gets plenty of direct sun. Onions grow best on raised beds or raised rows at least 4" high and 20" wide. The soil should be loose and crumbly; if it's compacted, work in compost to improve aeration and drainage.

PLANT

For the best growth and yield, onions need regular feeding right from the time of planting to the beginning of bulbing. Start by amending your soil heavily using a fertilizer designed for vegetables; a typical formulation for vegetables would be 4-6-2.

Plant the onions 1" deep and no deeper, as this will inhibit their ability to bulb. If you want the onions to grow to maturity, space them 4" apart. If you prefer to harvest some earlier as green onions, space them 2" apart and pull every other onion during the growing season, leaving the rest to grow to maturity. Space your rows 8-12 inches apart.

WATER, FERTILIZE AND, WEED

The better care your onions receive during the growing season, the more likely you'll have a bountiful harvest.

Watering

Water thoroughly after planting and regularly thereafter. Onions have shallow roots; don't let the soil at the base of the plants become dry and cracked. Over-watering is equally problematic; if leaves develop a yellow tinge, cut back on watering.

The closer to harvest time, the greater the need for water; however, when the onion tops start falling over, stop watering and let the soil dry out before harvesting.

Fertilizing

Nutritional needs are different during the growing season. As your onions begin to grow, feed them every 3-4 weeks with an ample amount of the vegetable fertilizer; also apply an equal amount of bone meal. Apply the fertilizer along one side of the onions 3-4 inches away from the plants. If you have more than one row, apply the fertilizer down the center of the two rows.

Weeding

Controlling weeds is critical to prevent competition for nutrients.

Mulching

Mulching with a light layer of straw will help control weeds and preserve moisture; be sure to push the straw back when the plants start to bulb so they'll cure properly.

Bulbing

When the ground starts to crack as the onions push the soil away, the bulbing process has begun. Stop fertilizing at this point.

HARVEST & STORE

Proper treatment at harvest maximizes the amount of time you'll be able to store your onions.



Harvest Time

When the tops of the onions turn brown or yellow and fall over, it's time to harvest. Ideally, the plant will have about 13 leaves at this point.

Pull the onions early in the morning on a sunny day. Dry the onions in the sun for two days; to prevent sunscald, lay the tops of one row over the bulbs of another.

Curing

How long your onions will keep depends on how you treat them after harvest. They must be dried thoroughly to avoid problems with rot.



If left outside when the weather is dry, this will take two or three days. The entire neck (where the leaves meet the bulb) should be dry all the way to the surface of the onion and shouldn't "slide" when you pinch it. The skin will take on a uniform texture and color.

Once the onions are thoroughly dry, clip the roots and cut back the tops to one inch. Now they are ready to eat.

Storing

Store onions in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location, such as a garage or cellar. Place them in mesh bags or netting to permit airflow.

Periodically check for any soft onions and remove them to avoid deterioration of the others.

As a general rule, sweeter onions don't store as long as more pungent ones, so use the sweeter onions first.



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About

Leeks are very easy to grow. They require fertile soil, which is high in organic material, and regular water through our dry months but are free of disease and pest problems.

Soil Preparation

Before planting your leek starts, prepare the soil by amending it well with well aged compost or soil amendments. Turn or till your soil to a depth of 6".

Planting

Choose a spot in your garden which is out of the way of your quick growing crops as your leeks will be in the ground through the fall or even winter. Plant your leeks 4-6 inches apart in rows 1 foot apart. If you plan on harvesting baby leeks to use like green onions, plant them 3 inches apart and harvest every other one as needed. There are a couple of techniques you can use to maximize the amount of white shaft (the edible part of your leeks). Inhibiting chlorophyll formation will keep your leeks tender, sweet, and full flavored.



Option 1

Use a dowel or stick to open a hole in the soil; insert the leek start into the hole to the depth of the bottom leaves which will allow the leek stems to grow underground and be kept white with little additional work. The disadvantage of this method is that you literally have to dig your leeks out of the ground.

Option 2

Plant your leek starts 1-2 inches deep and allow the stems to remain above the ground; as the leeks grow and the stems become longer, bury them by mounding soil up around them several times through the growing season. You can also use compost or straw as mounding materials. Remember that you have to prevent sunlight from reaching the stems so be sure the material is piled dense enough to shade the stems. This method make harvest easier as you can typically just pull them up; however, it is more labor intensive through the growing season.

Whichever technique you use, always work carefully around your leeks; soil or debris that gets caught in the leaf axis will often get trapped and filter in between the rings of your leeks.

WATER, FERTILIZE AND, WEED

The better care your leeks receive during the growing season, the more likely you'll have a bountiful harvest.

Watering

Water thoroughly after planting and regularly thereafter; if leaves develop a yellow tinge, cut back on watering.

Fertilizing

Feed regularly through the season with a fertilizer formulated for vegetables.

Weeding

Controlling weeds is critical to prevent competition for nutrients.

STORAGE AND HARVEST

It is best to keep or store your leeks in the garden. Harvest as you need them through the fall and winter but be sure to harvest by flowering time at the end of March.

Growing Leeks



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