

How to...

Grow Onions



Onions are one of the earliest crops to plant in spring; they can be stored throughout the year to give you a crop all year round.

Before planting you can add well rotted manure or composted organic matter, this should be done a few weeks before sowing seed or planting sets.

Sowing

Onions can be planted using either seeds or sets (which are small part grown onions). Sets are slightly more expensive but are easier to grow than seeds.

Seeds need to be planted in a drill (or channel) in the soil around 2cm deep and 2.5cm apart. The drills need to be about 30cm apart to allow for growing, and the soil should be moist before sowing.

If you are planting sets this can be done around mid to late March or slightly earlier if using a poly-tunnel.

The rows need to be spaced about 30cm apart and each set should be planted 10cm apart in each row.

To plant the sets you need to dig a small hole slightly shallower than the set and place it in the hole so that the neck (pointed end) is just above the surface of the soil.

Position

Onions will grow in most conditions and are frost resistant but do not plant them out in extreme cold or wet conditions. Onions will grow in most soil types but do prefer a slightly acidic soil (PH 5.5-6.5).

Care

Onion sets will do best if they are shallow hoed around regularly to remove weeds that will be competing for light and water. If you have planted seed you will need to thin out the seedlings. This is done by removing the weaker seedlings to give the larger ones more room to grow, they should be spaced to around 10cm apart.

Feeding

Onions can be fed during the growing season with a general purpose fertiliser such as Growmore, Bone Meal or Fish Blood and Bone.

Harvesting

The onions can be harvested one week after the leaves have dropped and have started to turn yellow. Use a fork to lift the onions, being careful not to damage them as this can cause problems when storing them later. Ideally onions should be lifted on a sunny day so they can be cleaned of any excess soil and be left in the sun to dry for a few days, or until the tops have dried out.

Storing

Once dried, cut the leaves off a few cms above the top of the onion to stop any diseases getting in. Throw away any onions that are damaged or have signs of disease as these will effect the good onions during storage. If you want to store your onions over winter you can either put them in mesh string bags or hang them from strings (you will need to leave the tops of your onions long enough to do this). Once done hang them for 3-4 weeks in a dry, airy position.