



Bookcliff Gardens

nursery & landscape

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Onions

Soil Preparation And Plant Selection

Onions prefer loose, well-drained soil, so take the time to amend your soil well. One or two cubic feet of **Soil Pep**, manure, or other well decomposed organic matter plus one half pound of **Bookcliff Gardens Choice Vegetable Fertilizer**, per twelve square feet tilled into the soil to a depth of 6" to 8" will give your onions a good start.

Dry onion sets are an old, reliable method of planting onions although the varieties available are more limited. Obtain your sets early when they are firm and dormant. Sets are generally available in three colors: red, white and yellow. Use bulbs that are larger than a dime for green onions because these may bolt and not produce good dry bulbs. Use the bulbs smaller than a dime for normal onion production. Green plants have become more available recently and offer reliable production with better variety selection.

Planting

Onion sets are usually planted in March or April. If planted when the weather is too cool, there is a tendency to get seed stalks instead of onion bulbs. Space your rows 1 to 2 feet apart. Place your bulb sets 1 to 1 1/2 inches deep and 3 to 4 inches apart. Green onion plants should be planted as they're growing in the flat and spaced 3 to 4 inches apart. Many people crowd in their sets, spacing them 1 or 2 inches apart, and then thinning them as they grow, using the thinned plants for green onions.

Maintenance

Water as necessary to keep the soil from drying out. Do not keep the soil so wet that it causes the bulbs to rot. Break off any flower stems that appear. Mulching can be useful to keep the need for water down and to prevent weeds from sprouting. Once the bulbs have swollen, pull the mulch back to expose the tops of the onions to the sun.

Harvesting

You can start pulling green onions in 3 to 4 weeks. It takes about 20 weeks to form a mature onion bulb. The bulbs are mature when 80% of their foliage turns brown and falls over. Onions that are not for immediate use need to be dried. You do this by lifting the onion up just enough to break their roots off. Leave them where they are in the ground. When the tops have totally dried, lift them and put them in a burlap or mesh bag. Leave your onions in the garden until you can lift the bag and hear a rustling of the dry skins. Onions will tolerate frosty nights but cannot withstand a freeze. If freezing temperatures are in the forecast, move your onions indoors until the threat of frost has past. The onions are now cured and can be moved to a dry, dark storage area. Try to keep the temperature between 35 and 40 degrees.