



Bucks Country Gardens

A Basic Guide to Growing Onion Sets

The onion set is a small, dried, immature bulblet, which has been raised from seed the previous year and picked when young. Each immature bulblet will produce a mature onion during the season. This quality allows the gardener to grow only as many onions as he or she needs.

There are two types of onion – one is the young, green or white bunching sort eaten fresh and before the mature bulb has formed. The other and much more common type is a large, coated bulb with a papery skin. These are used fresh, boiled or fried. Many can be stored for considerable periods.

WHITE ONIONS – Grow big and sweet, especially if started early.

RED ONIONS – The large “hamburger” Bermuda types, with tangy flavor.

YELLOW ONIONS – Not so large, but firm, and keep best of all for winter storage.

SOILS AND FERTILIZERS: Onions require a rich, well-drained soil, which must be steadily moist. The bulbs also need a loose soil in which to expand. To ensure the richness of the soil, work manure and fertilizer into the soil before planting. A pound of manure (such as Espoma Garden Manure) per square foot and 4 to 5 pounds of fertilizer (such as Organic Vermont Fertilizer) per 100 square feet will do the job.

PLANTING: Sets may be planted whenever reasonably warm weather has arrived. A fair criterion for your neighborhood is just before the common lilac passes out of bloom. Sets should be planted one to a hole, about 2 inches deep. The space between bulblets should be 4 inches for the onions expected to grow to maturity, 1.5 inches for the bunching type, which will soon be pulled out. Keep the rows 15 inches apart.

Planting a succession of onions ensures a crop until frosty weather arrives. But remember that mature onions take from 120 to 160 days to develop, so that successional sowings will very likely have to be harvested before maturity or as bunching onions.