

# Onions & Shallots

## Allium cepa

### A Garden Guide

Onions and Shallots are thought to have originated in Central Asia, Iran, and India, where they've been grown and bred for over 7000 years. They quickly spread throughout the ancient world. The ancient Chinese valued onions for their keeping ability in storage. The Romans used onions for culinary and medicinal purposes. One of the first crops the Mayflower settlers planted in the New World was onions. Onions and Shallots are now cultivated and eaten all around the world. They are eaten raw, cooked, pickled, and more.



**When to plant:** Plant sets and seeds outside as early as possible in the spring as soon as your soil is workable. This usually is 2 -4 weeks before our last frost date. Avoid having them in the ground while temps are 28°F or colder. You can also start seeds indoors, 6 weeks before our last frost date. Seeds need a soil temperature of 50°F to germinate properly. Do note that onion seeds do not age well, for best germination, buy fresh seeds every year.

**Siting:** Select a sunny spot (6-8 hours of direct sunlight) with rich, loose, well draining garden soil, high in organic matter. Heavy clay soils will require amending. Rotate crop locations from year to year, to decrease potential disease and pest issues.

**Planting:** Onions and Shallots prefer a pH of 6.2-6.8, with moist, well-draining soil. A good soil test will tell you exactly what to add, but usually in our soils, onions will need at least 1/3rd soil conditioner, up to 1/3rd rich composts, mixed with our native clay. Onion sets are pressed into the soil so that the point of the onion remains above the soil. Plant the sets 4" apart in rows, with 12" between rows, no deeper than 1" in the soil. For larger transplants and shallots, plant 4-6" apart. Onions are shallow rooted and need consistent moisture for flavorful good size bulbs to develop. They do not like root competition - keep well weeded. Mulch can help retain soil moisture and suppress weeds.





**Fertilizing:** Onions and Shallots thrive in rich soil. Espoma Bulb-tone® and Espoma Bio-tone® are good options. Neptune's Harvest Seaweed Plant Food (Kelp) is a delightful plant snack. Note that too much Nitrogen, applied to plants near maturity, can result in excessive top growth at the expense of the underground bulbs.

**Watering:** Consistent, even moisture is necessary for good yields.

**Harvesting:** For fresh green Scallions, you can begin to harvest when the leaves are 12-16" tall throughout the spring. If you are growing for cooking Onions or Shallots, allow them to ripen thoroughly. Harvest when 75% or more of the tops fall over.

**Organic Spray Schedule:** Onions and Shallots have few pest and disease issues here in NC. If they develop issues from Onion Thrips (*Thrips tabaci*), Neem Oil or Spinosad are good options.

**Processing:** When the cooking Onions are harvested, cut off their roots, and lay them in the sun for a few days allowing the outer skins to cure. Once they have FULLY dried, store by roping or hanging in netted bags in a cool, frost free dry spot for use throughout the winter.

**Usage:** Scallions can be stored in the refrigerator for 5 days and are perfect for grilling or on salads. Mature cooking Onions and Shallots can be used fresh on burgers and salads, cooked in your favorite dish, pickled or fermented with other vegetables, chutneys, dips, sauces, and more. To avoid stinging eyes when you peel and cut into an onion, you can plunge them into boiling water for a few seconds or peel them under running water. This will help neutralize the irritating compounds. Wearing swimming or lab goggles with good seals also works. Version 1.1 Feb 21

