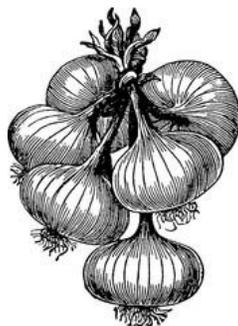


Onions



In Central Texas, onions can be planted by seed in October through mid-November, or by planting onion “sets” in January to February. An onion set is a bunch of small onion bulbs, planted instead of seed. When you purchase your onion set, keep them in a cool, dry area. **DO NOT PUT THEM IN WATER OR SOIL** while waiting to plant. The plants are in a dormant state, and should be planted as soon as possible. The roots and tops may begin to dry out, but don't be alarmed—as a member of the lily family, the onion can live for three weeks off of the bulb.

Planting time is critical, because onion plants are sensitive to both day length and temperature. If *sets* are planted in the fall, or if *seeds* are planted too early, they will likely bolt the next spring. Bolting means the onion will form a flower, which reduces size and density of the bulb, and makes it more prone to decay. Planting *seeds* too late may lead to immature plants being damaged by winter freezes. In CenTex, we have the most success with Short-Day Length onions.

Along with timing, the key to big beautiful onions is rich soil. Every ring of the onion is a leaf of the plant, so regular feeding with organic fertilizer is important. To plant, choose a location in full sun. To prepare existing soil for onions, mix in one of our quality composts. The resulting blend should be about 50:50 compost and soil. At the same time, mix in an organic **high phosphorus fertilizer** (one where the middle number is higher than the first number), **mycorrhizae** and a **mineral supplement**. Consider adding organic controls (such as *streptomyces* to prevent fungal diseases that effect onions. Adding coffee grounds and/or **Soil Sulfur** to the soil will help to slightly lower the pH. If you have shallow soil or poor drainage, make a raised bed for your onions. Use a prepared soil, and add all of the amendments listed above except for the compost.

If you are planting **onion seeds**, you may scatter them densely, but be sure to thin out the little green onions to 4” apart by February to get bigger bulbs. **Onion sets** should be planted one inch deep and four inches apart, or plant two inches apart and harvest every other one as a green onion. To help jump start either the seeds or the sets, water thoroughly after planting with a seaweed solution. Seaweed may be used once or twice a month to strengthen the plants. Fertilize every 4 weeks after planting with an organic, **high nitrogen fertilizer** to produce more leaves and bigger bulbs. Water the onions regularly and deeply to keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Add about three inches of mulch to help keep soil moist and to control weeds. When the ground starts to crack as the onions push the soil away, the bulbing process has begun. Stop fertilizing at this point.

Harvesting 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 to three 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. If rain is expected, you'll need to dry your onions indoors. Spread them out in a well-ventilated area with room to breathe. Drying indoors may take longer than outdoors.

Once the onions are thoroughly dry, clip the roots and cut back the tops to one inch. Now they are ready to eat.¹

Onion Varieties for Central Texas (Days to Harvest from sets)

1015Y Texas Supersweet (115) – Bulb can reach up to 6” in diameter. An open pollinated, **yellow** globe-shaped onion that is very sweet and mild. May store for 2 – 3 months. It gets its name because the seeds should be planted on October 15.

Yellow Granex (100) – Bulb can reach up to 5” in diameter. A hybrid, it is a sweet, semi-flat **yellow** bulb with rounded shoulders. May store for 1 month. The Yellow Granex is the famous Vidalia onion when it is grown in southern Georgia.

Texas Legend (105) – Bulb can reach up to 6” in diameter. Open pollinated, it is a sweet, **yellow**, globe-shaped onion. May store for 3 – 4 months.

Texas Early White (110) – Bulb can reach 5” – 6” in diameter. An open pollinated, sweet, **white**, globe-shaped onion. May store for 2 – 3 months. This variety became available to home gardeners in 2012. Disease and bolt resistant.

White Bermuda (95) – Bulb can reach 3” – 4” in diameter. Open pollinated, it is a pure **white**, sweet, mild, flat onion. May store for 2 months. This onion is also known as Crystal Wax, an heirloom variety.

Southern Belle Red (110) – Bulb can reach up to 4” in diameter. A hybrid, this sweet globe-shaped **red** onion has red rings that continue throughout the onion. May store 2 months. Bolt resistant.

¹ From Dixondale Farms “Onion Guides”