

Onions, Shallots & Garlic

Onions are easy to grow and take up little space in the garden. If you don't have a vegetable garden, they can easily be placed amongst flowers or in containers. Onions can be planted by seed, sets (bulbs), or slips (transplants). Shallots are nothing more than a mild-tasting, multiplier onion. Garlic is grown from individual cloves. Each clove will produce one plant with a single bulb-which may in turn contain up to twenty cloves. Growing garlic is, therefore, self-sustaining. Elephant garlic is more closely related to the leek than to ordinary garlic. A single clove of elephant garlic can be as large as a whole bulb of ordinary garlic. When cooking with elephant garlic, remember that it is NOT a substitute for ordinary garlic; rather it is used where a subtle hint of garlic is wanted without overpowering the rest of the food.

Preparation:

These crops need lots of sun, a soil that's been well prepared with ample compost and manure, and good drainage. They also have shallow roots and compete poorly with weeds and grasses, so timely, shallow hoeing and cultivation are important.

Planting:

Onion seed is best planted in the fall, about September 1st-October 1st and will be available for harvesting late the following spring. Onion sets (usually planted for salad onions) or onion slips (usually planted for slicing onions) can be set out around February 15th to March 15th. They should be planted about one inch deep, 4 inches apart in the row, and 18 inches between rows.

Fertilization of onions is vital to success. Yields can be greatly enhanced by banding fertilizer like super phosphate or 10-20-10 below and to the side of the onions with soil in between, for root development. Then, once established, onions should receive additional sources of nitrogen like ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) as a side dress once a month. Always water immediately after feeding and maintain a consistency in soil moisture.

Shallots, because they form a large clump of bulbs around the original, they should be planted 8 inches apart with the tip of the bulb barely showing. Fertilization will be similar to onions.

Garlic should be planted individually (separate the cloves), planted upright and about an inch deep. Plant the cloves about 4 inches apart in the row and 18 inches between rows.

Harvesting:

Onions are usually ready for harvest after about 100 days, although green or spring onions can be pulled when the stems are about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide and the tops are at least 6 inches tall. Thinning allows room for the other onions to get bigger for slicing onions. These will be ready when the tops yellow off and fall. Remove any plants that have formed flower stalks and use immediately.

Shallots should be harvested in late summer or early fall or when the tops die down. Garlic will reach maturity when the tops brown, then die away. If you harvest too early, the cloves will be too small, too late and the bulbs will have split. Handle garlic carefully, gently brushing off the soil, then hang in a cool, dry place.



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