

4. Harvest and Store

Proper treatment at harvest maximizes the amount of time you'll be able to store your onions.

Harvesting Onions

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 days. To prevent sunscald, lay the tops of one row over the bulbs of another. If rain is expected, you will need to bring them in from the field prior to the rain. The excess moisture can cause rotting issues.

Curing Onions

How long your onions keep depends on how you treat them after harvest. After they have dried in the field for a couple of days, it is recommended that they continue the drying process in a shed, garage, or other cool, shaded location. Be sure the location is well-ventilated so they can breathe.

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. This is how you know they are done drying.

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

Storing Onions

Store onions in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location, such as a garage or cellar. Place them in mesh bags or netting to permit airflow. Periodically check for any soft onions, and remove them to avoid deterioration of the others. As a general rule, sweeter onions don't store as long as more pungent ones, so use the sweeter onions first.

Growing Shallots:

Shallots grow best in long day area.



Upon Arrival/Soil Preparation

Care for shallots and prepare soil for shallots just as onions.

Planting

Plant shallots 1" to 1 1/2" deep and 2" apart. Water gently and thoroughly after planting.

Watering, Fertilizing, and Weeding

Care for shallots just as onions.

Harvesting

Shallots should be harvested 110-120 days once the tops have fallen over similar to onions.

Storing

Store shallots in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location. Place them in mesh bags or netting to permit air flow. Shallots are known for their long shelf life. If stored properly, they can store up to 8 months.

Growing Leeks

Leeks are easy to grow in cool climates. They're best suited to growing where temperatures range from 55-75 degrees. Unlike onions, daylength is not a factor in their growth.

Upon Arrival/Soil Preparation

Care for leeks and prepare soil for leeks just as onions.

Planting

Plant leeks 4" to 6" apart in rows 6" to 12" apart. Use the handle of a hoe to poke holes 6" to 8" deep where each plant will go. Place the transplants, one to a hole, so the youngest leaf protrudes just above the soil surface. Water gently and thoroughly after planting.

Watering, Fertilizing, and Weeding

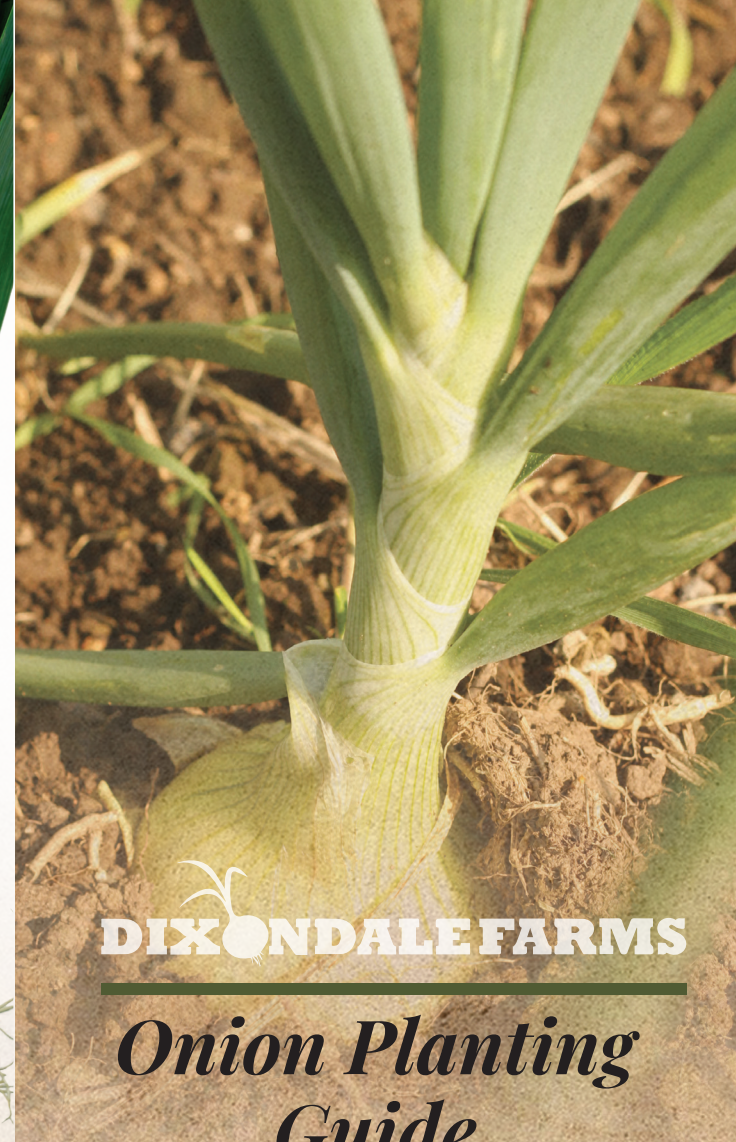
Care for leeks just as onions.

Harvesting

Leeks can be harvested at any time after 30 days. Because they're hardy, they're often left in the garden until needed.

Storing

After harvest, leeks need to be refrigerated near 32 degrees and at high humidity. Cool them upon digging, and pack them in plastic bags to prevent drying. They can be stored this way for 2-3 months. Leeks can also be stored frozen. For maximum flavor, cook them without thawing.



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Onion Planting Guide

Before You Plant

Remove plants from box the box immediately upon receipt.

Do not put in soil or water before planting.

Keep cool & dry until you can plant.

**Follow these instructions for best results.*

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4 Easy Steps To Growing Onions

Thanks for your order! Follow the instructions below, and soon you'll be enjoying big, sweet onions from your own back yard.

1. Prepare

While the enclosed plants may appear dry, don't be alarmed; they're simply dormant. Don't worry if you can't plant them immediately, even if the roots and tips begin to dry out. The onions can live off the bulb for approximately three weeks.

Do remove the plants from the box immediately. Keep them in a well-ventilated, cool area until you can plant them. Do not put them in soil or water or refrigerate.

Soil Preparation

Onions require full sun and good soil drainage. Choose a location that gets plenty of direct sun. Onions grow best on raised beds or raised rows at least 4" high and 20" wide. The soil should be loose and crumbly. If it's compacted, work in compost to improve aeration and drainage. For container growing, be sure there is at least 10 inches of soil depth.

To stop weeds for up to six weeks, rake a pre-emergent herbicide, such as Treflan or corn gluten meal, into the top inch of soil before you plant. Don't worry, the herbicide will not affect the onion plant roots.

Soil Type

It's helpful to know whether your soil is acid (pH below 7.0) or alkaline (pH above 7.0). Onions prefer soil with a pH between 6.2 and 6.8. Your agricultural extension service can test your soil for you, or you can buy a home test kit at your local garden center.



PRO TIP:

If your soil is too acidic, mix in ground limestone, available at your garden center. If it's too alkaline, add peat moss.

2. Plant

Plant your onions 4 to 6 weeks before the last estimated spring freeze. Our Recommended Ship Week Chart by ZIP Code is based off of this date. (Your agricultural extension service can tell you when that is.) For the best growth and yield, onions need fertilizer right from the start. Use a fertilizer with the middle number higher than the other two, such as 10-20-10.

Dig a trench that's 4" deep and 4" wide. Sprinkle 1/2 cup fertilizer per 10 linear feet of row. Cover the fertilizer with 2" of soil.

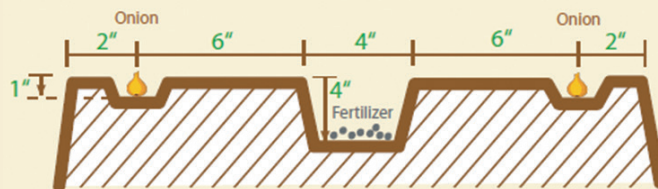
Plant the onions 6" from the edge of the trench on both sides of the trench. **DO NOT** plant the onions in the trench! Leave a 2" margin between the onions and the outside edge of the bed.

Plant the onions 1" deep and no deeper, as this will inhibit their ability to bulb.

If you want the onions to grow to maturity, space them 4" apart. If you prefer to harvest some earlier as green onions, space them 2" apart and pull every other onion during the growing season, leaving the rest to grow to maturity.

When planting several rows of onions, leave 16" between the outside edge of one bed, and the outside edge of the next. The spacing from the center of one fertilizer trench to the center of the next should be 36".

For container growing, be sure to plant no closer than 3 inches apart for mature onions.



3. Water, Fertilize, and Weed

The better care your onions receive during the growing season, the more likely you'll have a bountiful harvest.

Watering

Water thoroughly after planting, and regularly thereafter. Onions have shallow roots, so don't let the soil at the base of the plants become dry and cracked. Overwatering is equally problematic. If leaves develop a yellow tinge, cut back on watering. The closer to harvest time, the greater the need for water. However, when the onion tops start falling over, stop watering and let the soil dry out before harvesting.

The "knuckle rule" will help keep the right amount of moisture in your onions. Stick your finger in the ground. If you don't feel moisture up to your first knuckle, it's time to water. Drip and furrow irrigation are recommended over sprinkler which may promote the rapid spread of disease.

Fertilizing

Nutritional needs are different during the growing season. Every 2 to 3 weeks after planting, fertilize with ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) in alkaline soils, or calcium nitrate (15.5-0-0) in acidic soils. Sprinkle it on top of the original fertilizer strip at the rate of 1/2 cup per 10 feet of row. Water the onions after every application. Stop fertilizing when the onions start to bulb.

Look for the ground to start cracking as a sign bulbing has started.

Weeding

Controlling weeds is critical to prevent competition for nutrients. An application of Treflan or corn gluten meal raked into the top inch of soil every six weeks during the growing season will prevent weeds from returning. Mulching with a light layer of straw will help control weeds and preserve moisture. Be sure to push the straw back when the plants start to bulb so they'll cure properly.

Bulbing

When the ground starts to crack as the onions push the soil away, the bulbing process has begun. Stop fertilizing at this point.

Troubleshooting Tips for Growing Onions

The most common problems found in growing onions are blight, purple blotch, and thrips. Both blight and purple blotch are caused by fungus, and are more common during periods of high moisture. Blight appears as small white spots surrounded by a greenish halo. Purple blotch causes a purplish discoloration of leaves. Thrips are insects that sometimes attack onion plants, causing the leaves to turn grey. Thrips are barely visible as tiny yellow or dark specks. Treat thrip infestations with an application of insecticide.

Proper plant spacing helps increase air flow and reduces both blight and purple blotch. The best preventative measure, however, is the use of a fungicide such as Mancozeb, Disease Control, or Neem every two weeks after planting.