

GROWING ONIONS & GARLIC

“Flowering of onions can be caused by several things, but usually the most prevalent reason is temperature fluctuation. An onion is classed as a biennial, which means it normally takes 2 years to go from seed to seed. Temperature is the controlling or triggering factor in this process. If an onion plant is exposed to alternating cold and warm temperatures, the result is the onion plant going dormant, then resuming growth, then going dormant and resuming growth again. The onion bulbs prematurely flower or bolt. The onion is deceived into believing it has completed 2 growth cycles, or years of growth in its biennial life cycle so it finalizes the cycle by blooming. Flowering can be controlled by planting the right variety at the right time. Use only transplants that are pencil-sized, or smaller, in diameter when planting in early spring. In the early fall, always plant seed, NEVER transplants unless the onions are intended for eating green and not the bulb. So transplants of true-to-name Texas 1015Y onions should not be available until late November or December at the earliest. For more information about planting onion transplants in early spring, see: http://www.plantanswers.com/garden_column/012602/012602.htm”

BUT GARLIC.....

Garlic is just the opposite - DON'T plant garlic in the spring! Bulb formation in garlic occurs in response to the lengthening days of spring, and bulbing and maturity are considerably hastened if temperatures are high. In addition to these requirements, the dormant cloves (divisions of the large bulb) or young growing plants must be exposed to cold temperatures between 32 and 50 degrees F. for 1 or 2 months in order to initiate bulbing. Plants that are never exposed to temperatures below 65 degrees F. may fail to form bulbs. With fall plantings, the cold treatment is accomplished quite naturally throughout the winter, but a spring planting spells disaster.

Harvesting

Pull green onions anytime after the tops are 6 inches tall. Green onions become stronger in flavor with age and increasing size. They may be used for cooking when they are too strong to eat raw. Though leaves are traditionally discarded, all parts above the roots are edible.

Remove any plants that have formed flower stalks and use immediately. They do not produce good bulbs for dry storage. Harvest in late July or early August, when most of the tops have fallen over. Allow the plants to mature and the tops to fall over naturally. Breaking over the tops early interrupts growth, causing smaller bulbs that do not keep as well in storage.

Pull the mature onions in the morning and allow the bulbs to air dry in the garden until late afternoon. On especially hot, bright, sunny days, the bulb may sunburn. On days when this is likely, remove onions to a shaded location and allow them to dry thoroughly. Then, before evening dew falls, place them under dry shelter on elevated slats or screens or hang them in small bunches. Tops may be braided or tied with string before hanging. Full air circulation for 2 to 3 weeks is necessary for complete drying and curing. Keep the dry wrapper scales as intact as possible on the bulbs, as they enhance the keeping ability.

After the bulbs dry, cut the tops 1 _ to 2 inches long (at or above the narrow spot where the stem bent over), and place the bulb in dry storage with good air circulation. Do not try to store bulbs that are bruised, cut or diseased, or those with green tops or thick necks. Store under cool, dry conditions. Dry onions may keep until late winter, but check them regularly and use or discard those that begin to soften or rot.