



*From the Martin's Home & Garden library*

# Planting Onions



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**O**nions are an easy vegetable to grow in your garden! You'll often find them ready to be planted in a couple of different forms: as onion sets (young onions with a few leaves and white shanks) or as onion bulbs (young onions with no leaves or shanks).

**Questions? Give Martin's Home & Garden a call at 615-867-7121!**



**01**

# Choosing Onion Sets

## Grocery Store *versus* Garden Center

Why should you use the onion sets you find at a garden center rather than the onions you find at a grocery store for planting?

Produce at a grocery store, including onions, is often treated with a growth inhibitor. The growth inhibitor keeps produce from sprouting, which keeps it fresher for a longer period of time. This means, though, that the onion may never take root in your garden if you plant it. The onions at the grocery store may not have been tested for common plant diseases, as well.

Onion sets at a garden center, however, have not been treated with a growth inhibitor. Most garden centers also receive their onion sets from a certified, reputable dealer that provides certified disease-free onions. This means that the ones you grow will not inherit any problems from the mother plant.





**02**

# Planting & Harvesting

## Timing

Plant your onions two to four weeks before the last frost of the year. In middle Tennessee, our last frost is usually around mid-April.

If you purchase your onions early, you can store them until it's time to plant. Choose a place that has good ventilation and is cool, dark, and dry.

## Planting & Care

Make sure your soil is ready. Onions like fertile, well-draining soil, so amend yours as necessary. Include a fertilizer to help your onions get the best start.

Dig a hole about 1" deep for onion bulbs and 4" deep for onion sets. Space your onions at least 6" apart from each other. Place them in the hole with their base (the end with the roots) facing down.

Fill your hole with enough soil to stabilize your onions, but don't mound the soil up too much above them. Water them thoroughly.

Add some mulch around your garden beds. The mulch helps suppress any weeds trying to grow with your new vegetables. It will also help your soil stay moist and temperature-regulated.

Onions like frequent waterings during the growing season. The sweeter you want your onions to be, the more you should water them. This is why it's important to make sure the soil around them drains well. You don't want your onions to sit in pools of water, rotting. Soak the soil every day until new green tops start to peek up, then cut back your watering schedule to every other day.

Stop watering when the top of your full-size onions start to fall over. When half of the tops have fallen over, it's time to harvest!



## Harvesting

Scallions will be ready to harvest from onion sets about one month after planting. Wait until the green shoots reach about 5" tall and the white necks are several inches long. Green onions are scallions that have been left about one week later. A small bulb will have developed, and the flavor will be stronger.

If an onion has sent up a flower stalk, it is done growing. Pull it up from the ground immediately, and use it within a few days. These will not be good stored.

As onions mature, their foliage will begin to turn yellow and start to fall over. When the foliage turns brown (typically, at least 100 days about planting), pull up the onion with the top still intact. Handle your new onions carefully! They are delicate, so try not to bruise them.

Let your onions dry before you store them to prevent rotting and fungal diseases. Spread them in a single layer on a surface in a clean, dry, well-ventilated location. As they dry, the skins will turn papery and tight. After about two to three weeks, the neck should be completely dry. Cut them down to within 1" of the top of the onion bulb.

Onions should be stored in a well-ventilated area that stays dry at all times. Don't keep them in plastic bags because they won't get enough airflow. Check your stock periodically for any rotting ones, and discard those immediately. Properly stored onions can last 10 to 12 months.





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