



Growing Onions in Central Indiana

Onions can be successfully grown from sets, seeds, or plants in central Indiana. However, growing them from sets or plants is the easiest method. Here at Garden Gate, we sell sets and plants. Both can be used for “green onions” (pulling immature plants before they mature) or for mature onions (for winter storage). We select long-day varieties for our growing area.

Onions are best planted in the early spring as soon as the ground can be worked. Onions planted late in the season seem to be more pungent than onions planted earlier. They require full sun for good bulb development, no less than 6 hours of full sunlight. Onions grow best in loose soil high in organic matter. On heavy clay soils, add a 3-4 inch layer of peat or compost, till the area, and then plant the onions. All vegetable plants do better in high organic soils, so we encourage you to add compost, peat, or most any organic matter to your garden continually to improve the soil structure. For green onions (pulling), plant 1-2 inches apart in rows close together. However, if you want some plants to mature, then plant in rows 18-24 inches apart. As the season progresses, continue to use or thin to a spacing of 4-5 inches apart. Plant onion sets in the row 1-2 inches deep and cover with soil. Plant onion plants so that the bulb is 1/2” – 1” below the soil surface.

To grow nice-sized onions, we recommend 3 applications of ¼ cup of 12-12-12 per 10 feet of row (about 3 good steps). Apply at planting, again after 4 weeks, and again after 8 weeks. Weed control is very important. Mulching with organics can help keep weeds under control and conserve moisture. However, when the plants become 8-10 inches tall, begin mounding the soil up around the plants to form a ridge or hill. Continue to do this till harvest. Mounding the soil as bulbs develop keeps them from being exposed to sunlight which causes the tops of onions to turn green.

By mid-summer you should start to feel pretty good about your onion crop. While it’s okay to selectively use some of your plants, don’t get too anxious about digging for storage until the tops of two-thirds of the plants have fallen over and develop papery skin. At this time, gently bend the other tops over and allow them to dry in the ground for several days. After this, dig the bulbs and allow to dry in a dark, ventilated area dark (avoid leaving them in the sun or a well lit area). After several weeks, sort through the crop and pull out soft or damaged bulbs. Store on open shelves one layer deep, tops tied together. Or store them in old onion bags in a cool area just above freezing. Any questions?