

Growing Onions

Sets are easy to grow, with a small set turning into a full-sized bulb without any attention from you. Sets are the immature plants that are raised from seed the previous summer. Because they were sown at a very high density, they do not reach sufficient size to bolt – they just carry on growing instead.

Planting out Plant sets as soon as you receive them, pushing gently into the soil so the tips are level with the surface. It's a good idea to cover them with pea sticks or fleece to prevent birds pulling them out. To get lots of small bulbs about 5cm (2in) in diameter, plant 2.5cm (1in) apart in rows 15cm (6in) apart. To get larger bulbs 10cm (4in) across, plant 10cm (4in) apart instead.

The chance of bolting is decreased if you avoid planting in cold, wet soil. Onions thrive in a sunny, well-drained situation. Keep weed-free, especially early on.

Harvest Harvest in the spring. The foliage will yellow and fall over naturally. Lift the bulbs with a fork to break the roots and leave them on the soil surface to ripen fully in the sun. In a wet spring, move them to a greenhouse bench to ripen.

Maintenance It is important to move the onion bed around every year to prevent the build-up of diseases like onion white rot.

Growing Garlic

Planting out Plant garlic outside as soon as you can after you receive it. Traditionally, it's planted on the shortest day of the year to be harvested on the longest, and if you stick to somewhere near those dates, you'll be fine.

Garlic grows best in a sunny site in light, well-drained soil. Split the bulb into cloves and plant these individually, each clove upright, with the flat base down and pushed into the soil to twice their own depth, spaced at intervals of 15cm (6in) or 30cm (12in) for Elephant garlic.

Maintenance They need very little after care. Just nip off the flower bud if one appears and keep the area weed-free until the foliage turns yellow.

As soon as the leaves start to fade and dry, the plants need to be lifted. They can be bunched or plaited together and stored in a cool, dry, frost-free area for several months until required.