

# Growing Great Alliums: The basics for success...

Garlic, onions and shallots are considered light feeders in the garden. They are best planted after heavy feeders like corn, broccoli, brussels sprouts, squash or melons. They enjoy a fine seed bed with little fresh organic matter (like newly taken-down cover crops) but plenty of well-aged compost. Clumps and clods of freshly decomposing green material in allium plantings encourages a host of creepy-crawlies, like the onion maggot and others, to inhabit the same space as your alliums and that can lead to crop damage, decreased yields and poor curing & storage of your crop.

**For best performance, FEED YOUR ALLIUMS the following throughout their growing season:**

**PER 100 ft. row, 3 rows to the bed:**

Before Planting: Work in 10# (5-10-10)

In Late February: Side-dress an additional 2.5# Nitrogen

In Late March: Side-dress with another 2.5# Nitrogen

**PER ACRE:**

Before Planting: Work in 75# Nitrogen, 150# Phosphorus and 150# Potassium

In Late February: Side-dress an additional 25# Nitrogen

In Late March: Side-dress with another 25# Nitrogen

Even soil moisture and regular water throughout their season is essential for good bulb production. If moisture is erratic and inconsistent, bulb size will be negatively impacted. Alliums need about an inch of water per week. If it does not rain, it's up to you to provide the difference. Prior additions of organic matter will help the soil hold on to water and provide your alliums with the steady moisture they need. One good soaking per week is better than watering them a little bit each day. Back off on the water starting in May to allow the alliums to begin drying out in preparation for harvest and curing.

Generally, alliums are ready to harvest when 1/3 of their leaves are brown and start to desiccate. For onions, the tops will fall over on their own or if lightly pushed; for garlic, the lower 1/3 of the plant will begin to yellow and turn brown. For shallots, lower leaves will turn brown and upper leaves will fade in color. Shallots typically take as long, if not longer than hard neck garlic. In the Southeast, they may come out as late as July. Start checking your allium crops in mid-May to see how they are progressing. These harvest guidelines are just reference points; use your judgment based on how things are looking and don't hesitate to pull a few to investigate. Every season will be a little different than the last.

After pulling your alliums, spread them out in a single layer in a well-ventilated spot for 2-6 weeks until all the outer paper wrappers are completely dry and crispy to the touch. A box fan can be used to ensure good air flow. Only after all the excess moisture is removed from the crop can it be stored in a cool, dry place for 2-10 months (crop-dependent).

# **Bulb Onions Demystified:** An explanation of seed stock

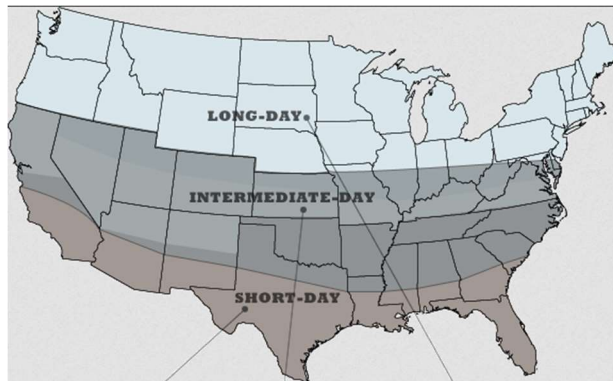
**Latitude Matters:** Of the hundreds of varieties of bulb onions, each one is adapted to form bulbs at different latitudes as a result of how much day light they receive.

Regardless of when you plant, bulbing only occurs in the summer. You can plant onions at any time and get greens, but plants only produce a bulb once per year.

**The categories of latitude adaptation are:**

- **SHORT DAY** (25-35 degrees lat.)\_ Bulb formation initiates at 10-12 hours daylight.
- **INTERMEDIATE DAY** (32-42 degrees lat.)\_ Bulb formation initiates at 12-14 hours daylight.
- **LONG DAY** (37-47 degrees lat.)\_ Bulb formation initiates at 14-16 hours daylight.

**In NC, we are in Intermediate Day territory at 35 degrees latitude.** We can plant Short Day or Intermediate Day varieties and get bulbs but NOT Long Day varieties. Long day varieties will only produce green onions for us here since our longest day on the Summer Solstice is 14.5 hours. The caveat is that each latitude adaptation categorization is general; there *are some* Long Day varieties that do perform here at 35 degrees. You'll have to trial each variety and make your own performance notes.



**Temperature Matters:** After selecting appropriate varieties adapted to your latitude, storage of planting stock and growing temperatures in the fields are critically important to bulb onion production. **As it pertains to ONION SETS** (tiny quarter-sized onions), storage temperature dictates whether or not your sets will yield bulbs or bolt/flower. Onions sets are physiologically over a year old. Proper storage temperatures for holding onion sets so they will bulb are 32-33 degrees OR above 65 degrees. Any storage temperatures in between 33-65 will trigger the sets to bolt in the spring. This is disappointing if you're expecting bulbs only to find out in May that you will not be getting the bulb crop of your dreams. Bolting onions will still produce a bulb, but they will not be as large as plants that do not bolt. Additionally, they will not store as long.

**Age of Stock Matters:** For bulb production, the rule of onion is: **If you are under a year old, you will bulb 100% of the time if you receive the right amount of daylight. If you are older than a year, you may bulb, bolt (flower) or do both.** Whether or not you bulb or bolt hinges on temperature of storage or of field conditions. This means.... Onions from seed and plants will bulb every time. Onions grown from sets might bolt if they are planted in the fall and winter temperatures are irregular or if storage temperatures of the sets were not optimum.

## **So What Do I Plant?**

### **For Scallions & Green Onions:**

#### **PLANT SETS.**

**Plant in fall or spring.** These are the quarter-sized tiny onions sold in a bag. Nothing will be faster than a set in producing gorgeous green onions. In 30-60 days, you'll have something to eat or sell. Fall-planted stock can be harvested immediately, over-wintered for extended harvest.

Plants not harvested by the time May rolls around may bulb or flower.

### **For Bulbs:**

#### **BUNCHED PLANTS ARE BEST**

#### **SETS FROM OUR FEBRUARY SHIPMENT WORK WELL, TOO**

**Plant in spring only.** For bunched onion plants, we are working With Dixondale Farms for 2024. Local market farmers all agree that their bulb crops from Dixondale stock is exceptional and always meets or exceeds expectations. The varieties offered by Dixondale are not available by other suppliers and round out our bulb onion offerings nicely. We hope you'll enjoy the selection!

Spring planted onion sets can also yield a good bulb crop but it's important to wait until our February shipment. Storage conditions in our suppliers' warehouse are optimum for keeping sets at the right temperature so they will bulb come summer and not bolt. Try out Corinthian, Conquest and White King for storage yellows and whites if you've got space. See how they compare to Dixondale's varieties in production, storage time and flavor.

Thanks for working with us & may all your allium adventures succeed!



# Seasonal Planting Stock Available from...



## Strawberry Plugs

Order: Late May

Arrival: Mid September



## Seed Garlic

Order: August

Arrival: September/October



## Seed Potatoes

Order: November & December

Arrival: Mid February

## Sweet Potato Slips

Order: April

Arrival: June

Want to know what we're up to next? Our latest offerings, order dates & deadlines are sent right to you if you **sign up for our email newsletter!**

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