

Onion Culture: A Step-by-Step Guide

How do I produce a great crop year after year? Here are my tips for quick reference. For planting and maintaining:

- Onions are a cold weather crop. Plant **early**- April 5-10
- Work into a 20' row 2" of compost and 1 ½ - 2 cups all natural, high phosphorus fertilizer (*Espoma Garden-tone*). Rake smooth.
- Plant *Wallas* 5-6" apart, *Copras and Redwings* 4-5" apart, and Long Day Samplers 5-6" apart, all 1" deep. Press in and water.
- Keep plants evenly watered and weeded all season.
- May 1st water in a natural liquid fertilizer high in nitrogen (*Neptune's Harvest Hydrolyzed Fish* or *Dr. Earth Nitro Big*) at recommended rate. Repeat May 25th and once again June 15th. Do not fertilize again after this application.
- Bulbing begins in earnest right around the solstice, June 21st.
- When leaves fall over and turn brown (late July- early August), it's time to harvest. Do not leave onions in the ground past this point, or the necks will begin to deteriorate; curing and storage will be compromised.

Once you arrive at harvest time, care needs to be taken to cure and store these beauties. It is said that *Walla Wallas* only last 6-8 weeks in storage, yet I have enjoyed them into November. However, try to use them early on when they are at their best- in sauces, stir fries, pickles, raw- you name it- they are simply delicious. Some folks chop and freeze them for future use. But no matter the onion, once out of the ground, what do you need to know?

- Once again when leaves fall over, it's time to pull your onions.
- Brush off soil (do not wash) and place them in a sunny spot on top of something with good air circulation all around them. I use crates.
- To prevent sunscald place the tops of one row over the bulbs of another.
- If rain is predicted, bring them inside. This will delay drying.
- With good weather on your side, the leaves and necks should be dry in 3-5 days, and outer skin of the bulbs will be papery.
- At this point cut tops back to one inch, and clip roots back to the bulb. I always squeeze the neck to make sure no moisture is present. If all is well, I place them in stackable wire bins (single layer), and place the bins against my very cool, dark cellar wall. Long after I use up all my *Wallas*, I get to pluck my *Copras* as needed all winter. Best of all, they take me right into spring. How good is that? Plus you just can't beat homegrown!