



Growing Shallots

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WHEN TO PLANT:

It is always best to plant in the fall because fall-plantings yield twice as much. Protected by a good mulch and snow cover, these shallots, have survived minus 25°F. However, if the winters are unusually severe, like ours in Colorado, it's safer to plant in the spring. The standard rule of thumb for spring planting is to do so right around St. Patrick's Day. Then the bulbs can burst into rapid growth as soon as the soil warms up.

SOIL PREPARATION:

All members of the onion family grow best in light loam that is rich in organic matter and plant nutrients. The smaller onions like shallots yield reasonably well under many conditions, just so long as the soil is well-fertilized, well-drained and kept moist. However, waterlogged soil will make the bulbs rot or adversely affect their appearance and quality. In infertile soil the bulbs will be very small.

HOW TO PLANT:

Space shallots 4-6 inches apart, the rows 18 inches apart. Plant the bulb root side down, the top of the bulb 1 inch below the surface. Planting too deep grows elongated bulbs that don't store well.

GROWING:

If you want really large bulbs, side dress the plants when growth begins in spring. When the bulbing begins, any mulch or soil covering the bulbs should be pulled back so the bulbs form on the surface of the soil and dry down.

HARVEST:

The tops of these species often make very tasty scallions—however, if you snip off too many sprouts, there will be fewer and smaller bulbs. It is important that the bulbs form tough protective skins. To accomplish this the plants must mature in dry soil. So, as the bulbs are forming you should stop watering them. The time to harvest is when most of the tops have browned off and fallen over. Loosen the soil first with a spading fork and then gently lift the bulbs. Their skins have not hardened yet so it is important to avoid bruising or tearing the skin. The bulbs, with their tops still attached, should be air-dried for 2-3 weeks until the tops have completely shriveled. Then cut the tops off with sharp scissors or pruning shears about 1 inch above the bulb, spread the bulbs out on wire racks in the shade or in a garage to cure for 2-3 months. By then it will be time to store them for the winter (those you haven't eaten yet).

STORAGE:

Like all onion bulbs, shallots need cool, dry storage with lots of air circulation. They are best hung in mesh sacks at a temperature of about 40°F- 50°F.