

Planting Shallots

SOIL PREPARATION

Multipliers will grow in a range of soil types, but yields will be greatly improved when you pay close attention to soil structure. Bulbs do best in a well-drained, sandy loam well-supplied with organic matter. Roots need air as much as they need water. Thus, it is best to avoid waterlogged soil which can cause onions to rot or grow poorly. Clay soil should be lightened with peat moss, compost, or well-rotted manure. Use at least one part organic matter to two parts soil. Sand can be used to increase drainage, but the sand grains need to be large (approx. 1/16 inch diameter) otherwise you'll make the drainage worse instead of better. Sandy soil should be fortified with well-rotted organic matter, using one part organic matter to two parts soil. Peat moss and well-rotted sawdust are excellent materials for loosening soil.

SOIL FERTILITY REQUIREMENTS

For best results, keep pH at 6.5 to 7.0. Soil which is too acid or too alkaline will cause slow growth and late maturity. If necessary, raise the pH of your soil by adding dolomitic limestone. To lower pH, add sulfur dust or fertilize with ammonium sulfate. Onions are heavy feeders and respond well to fertile soil. It is important that phosphorous and potassium be in abundance. Use colloidal phosphate to supply phosphorous, and greensand to supply potassium. These materials also supply many trace elements, and fertility is maintained in the soil for several years. Nitrogen is supplied in the form of compost, manure, or other suitable nitrogen-containing material. Work these materials into the soil well ahead of planting time. At the time of planting, bulbs may benefit from a teaspoon of bonemeal beneath each bulb. If the nitrogen level is low, add nitrogen when the leaves are 4" to 6" high, and again in late April. Fish emulsion (5-1-1) works well for this purpose. Nitrogen should not be applied during bulb formation. Too much nitrogen at this time could produce bulbs which are susceptible to rot.

Spring planting depth: Plant multiplier onions (shallots) approximately 1/2 to 2/3 the depth of the bulb. Small bulbs (less than 1" diameter) should be planted so that the top of the soil barely covers the bulb. Garlic and topset onions are planted with approximately 1" of soil covering the top of the cloves.

Spacing: When planting in intensive raised beds, large bulbs (3" to 4" diameter) should be planted a minimum of 6" to 8" apart, depending on bulb size. Smaller bulbs (1/2" to 2" diameter) should be planted 4" to 6" apart, depending on bulb size. When planting in rows, large bulbs should be spaced a minimum of 4" apart, and small bulbs a minimum of 2" to 3" apart.

CULTIVATION

It is essential that the soil be kept moist during the entire period of active growth. If the soil is allowed to dry out just once, growth will be arrested and you'll have smaller bulbs and a reduced yield. One or two inches of mulch between rows will conserve moisture and control weeds. Keep well-weeded: onions and weeds don't mix.