VEGETABLES · A SUNNY PATIO IN YOUR LOCAL ONION PLANTING SEASON

Let's grow onions.

Allium cepa

This plan is for **Bulb onion (Allium cepa; locally suitable day-length type)**

Six little starts. A pot of onions for your kitchen.

16-inch-wide pot **6 onion starts**

Before you start

Plant a locally suitable onion variety in its planting season: usually spring for northern long-day onions, fall or winter for southern short-day onions.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 25, 2026 View sources

LIGHT

Lots of sun

Give the pot at least 6 hours of direct sunlight.

WATER

Steady moisture

Keep the shallow roots from drying out while bulbs swell.

FEEDING

Feed before bulbs swell

Use the mix's starter nutrients, then a measured top-up during leaf growth. Stop regular feeding when bulbing begins.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ One draining pot, 16 inches wide and at least 12 inches deep
- ✓ Fresh potting mix, a watering can, and a plant label
- ✓ 6 young bulb-onion transplants of one variety suited to your region

THE SOIL

Miracle-Gro Organic Potting Mix (US, SKU 78951430). Contains starter nutrients; follow the feeding instructions on your actual bag.

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

One pot. Here's the plan.

A sunny patio in your local onion planting season. Start with **young onion transplants**.

THE POT

16-inch-wide pot

At least 12 inches deep, with clear drainage holes.

HOW MANY

6 onion starts

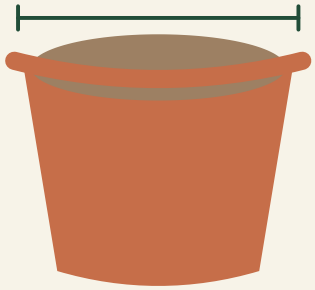
Two rows of three plants, 4 inches apart in every direction.

THE CONTAINER

16-inch-wide pot

START WITH

6 onion starts



Drainage holes



Illustration · not to scale

16-inch-wide pot · 6 onion starts At least 12 inches deep, with clear drainage holes. Two rows of three plants, 4 inches apart in every direction. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Match the onion to your city

At a nursery, ask for bulb-onion transplants for your city: long-day for the North, short-day for the far South, or intermediate-day for the middle band. Check the variety label rather than buying by color alone.

02

Set out six starts

Fill the pot with damp mix. Make two centered rows of three holes, 4 inches apart. Set each transplant about 1 inch deep with its roots covered and green leaves above the mix. Water gently.

03

Let the bulbs show

Keep weeds out and moisture steady. As bulbs swell above the surface, leave them exposed. Do not heap mix around their necks.

04

Wait for tops to fall naturally

Keep bulbs exposed as they grow, but do not pull soil away from their roots or bend the leaves over. When most healthy tops naturally flop and begin drying, stop watering and lift gently. Use damaged or flowering onions first; cure sound bulbs before storage.

Help with the setup: drainage holes and saucers · potting mix vs. garden soil.

Other ways to start

Plant small onion sets

Use six firm sets smaller than a penny, from a variety suited to your area. Plant pointed end up with about 1 inch of mix covering each set, at the same 4-inch spacing. Larger sets are more likely to flower; transplants give you clearer variety choices.

Raise your own transplants

Start fresh onion seed indoors about 8–10 weeks before your outdoor planting date. Sow ¼ inch deep in seed-starting mix, keep it moist, and provide bright light. Raise extras, then select six healthy seedlings and gradually acclimate them outdoors.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

During growth, water when the top inch starts drying and drain. Stop when mature bulbs have healthy tops naturally falling; shelter from heavy rain.

FERTILIZER

Espoma Garden-tone (US 3-4-4)

AMOUNT

2 level tablespoons for the entire 16-inch pot

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

Dry granules at the label rate of 1½ teaspoons per 4 inches of diameter. This is the whole-pot amount for all six onions.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

No sooner than monthly, during early leaf growth only.

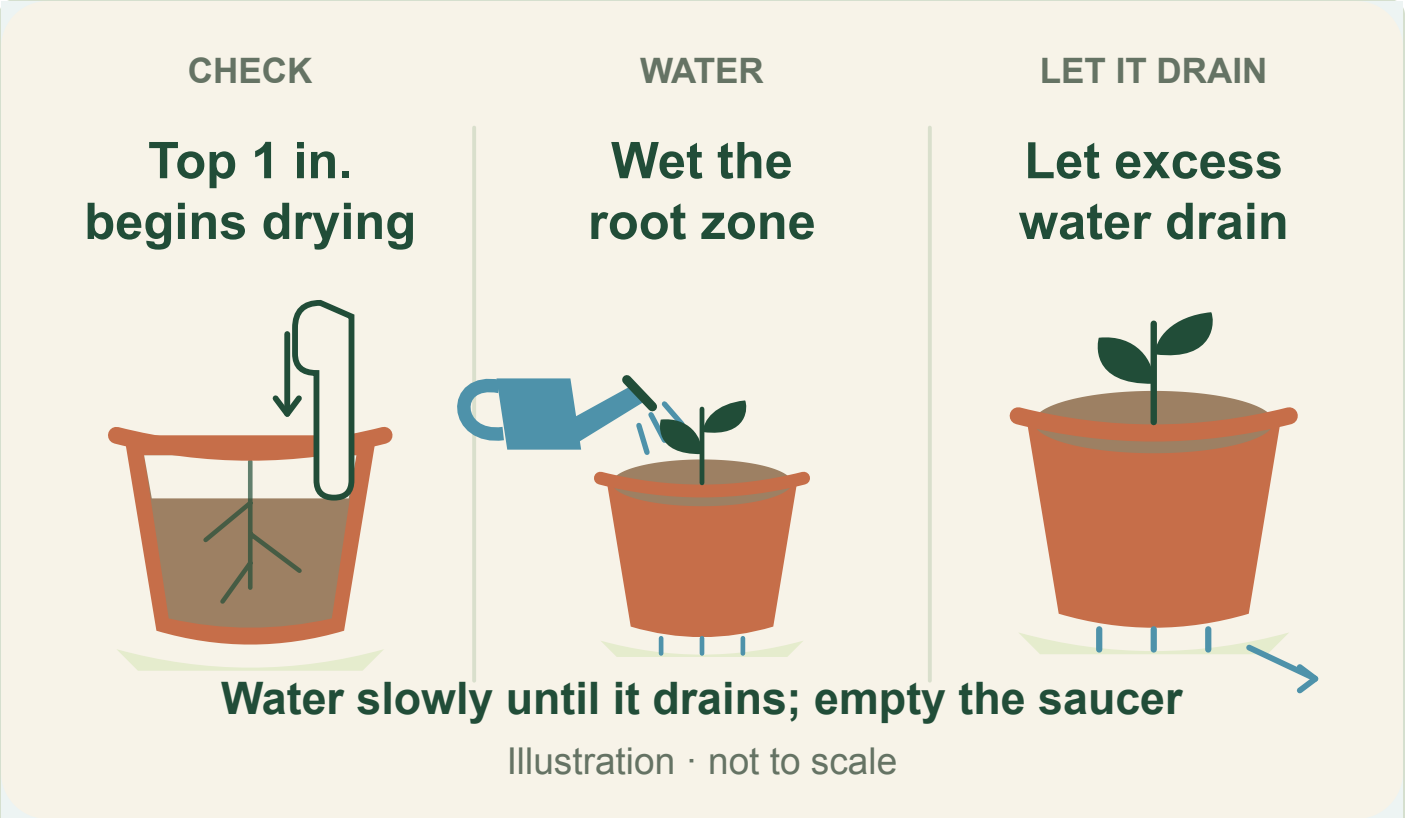
WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

Skip at planting in enriched mix. Follow the bag's starter-feed period, then top up during leaf growth. Stop regular feeding when bulbs begin swelling.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

Check each morning. During growth, water as the top inch starts drying, slowly wetting the mix until excess drains. Keep moisture steady while bulbs swell. When healthy tops naturally start falling and yellowing near maturity, stop watering and let the crop finish; shelter the pot from heavy rain. Wilting young plants or diseased leaves are not a harvest signal.



Check before watering. During growth, water when the top inch starts drying and drain. Stop when mature bulbs have healthy tops naturally falling; shelter from heavy rain. Original illustration; not to scale.

> **The easy rule**
>
> Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

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02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

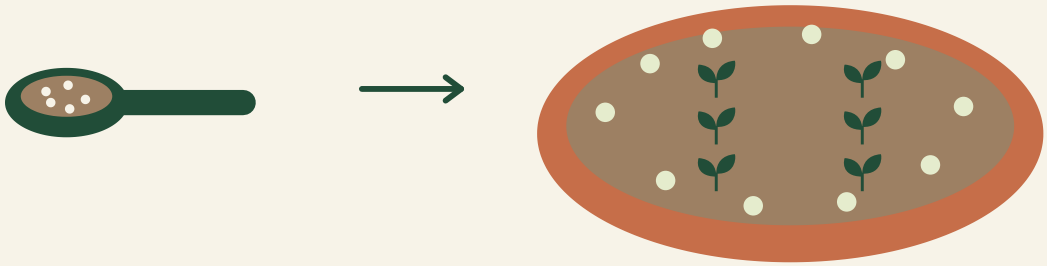
The named mix already contains fertilizer. Check the actual bag's feeding period before adding more. For this conservative pot recipe, top up only during leaf growth after that starter feed ends, and stop regular feeding when the base begins to swell into a bulb. Do not wait until the tops fall over to stop.

MEASURE

2 level tbsp

SHARE ACROSS ONE CONTAINER

16-inch pot



Around the outer edge

Whole-pot dose · then water in

Illustration · not to scale

2 level tablespoons for the entire 16-inch pot Dry granules at the label rate of 1½ teaspoons per 4 inches of diameter. This is the whole-pot amount for all six onions. No sooner than monthly, during early leaf growth only. Skip at planting in enriched mix. Follow the bag's starter-feed period, then top up during leaf growth. Stop regular feeding when bulbs begin swelling. Original illustration; not to scale.



US PRODUCT REFERENCE

Espoma Organic

Garden-tone

3-4-4

Granular: measure onto growing mix

Check the official US product ↗

Illustrated reference; check the manufacturer's current packaging and US label.

EARLY LEAF GROWTH ONLY

Espoma Organic Garden-tone (US 3-4-4 granules)

Apply 2 level tablespoons of Garden-tone 3-4-4 to the whole 16-inch pot, not to each onion. Scatter near the outer edge, away from plants, then water in. That equals the label's 1½ teaspoons per 4 inches of diameter. Repeat no sooner than monthly while still in the early leaf-growth stage; stop at bulbing. This is a simple container feeding choice, not a replacement for a soil-test program in a garden bed.

Check the manufacturer's product page ↗

These are dry granules, measured for the whole pot, not for each plant. Keep them off stems and leaves, then water in. Use the named US product and the directions on your bag.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Bulb harvest timing and expected size

Many bulb-onion varieties need roughly 85–120 days, with substantial differences between spring and fall plantings. At 4-inch spacing, aim for useful kitchen-size onions rather than giant show bulbs.

Planting windows for your onion type

Northern long-day onions usually start outdoors in early spring. In the far South, short-day varieties commonly start in fall or winter. Ask your local nursery for the planting window for the named variety. "Long-day" describes seasonal daylight, not a reason to put the pot in shade.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

Something looking off?

Which onion type should I buy?

Use long-day varieties in the northern US and short-day varieties in the southern US, with roughly 35°N as a broad dividing line. Intermediate-day varieties suit many central locations. There is overlap: use the supplier's city or latitude map for that variety, especially near the boundary.

Why are there leaves but no proper bulbs?

A variety with the wrong day-length requirement may bulb too early or fail to bulb well. Crowding, too little light, and irregular water also reduce size. Check those before adding more fertilizer.

Should I cut the green tops to make bigger onions?

Leave healthy leaves on the six plants you want to grow into bulbs. To harvest green onions instead, pull a whole plant when useful in the kitchen; that removes it from the bulb crop.

What if an onion grows a flower stalk?

Harvest and use that onion promptly. It will not store as well. Cutting the stalk does not restore the normal storage life.

How do I store the harvest?

Cure undamaged bulbs with tops attached in a dry, sheltered place with airflow until necks and skins are dry, usually 1–3 weeks. Trim the dry tops, then use a ventilated basket or mesh bag. Sweet varieties keep for less time than storage varieties.

Can pets share the harvest?

No. Onions are toxic to cats and dogs. Keep the crop and discarded trimmings out of their reach; contact a veterinarian if a pet eats them.

Choosing the right onion for your region

Choose an onion matched to regional day length

You do not need to calculate sunlight hours every day. Choose a variety marked for your growing region once, and put the pot in full sun. A winter hardiness zone alone does not tell you which onion day-length type to buy.

Distinguish bulb onions from other onion crops

This plan grows six Allium cepa plants for bulbs. The two centered rows of three, 4 inches apart, are our container adaptation of published block spacing for moderate-size bulbs. Bunching onions and walking onions need different harvest plans. Growing a full-size bulb from kitchen scraps is not promised here.

Help with your next step.

Set up a pot that drains

Choose drainage holes and manage the saucer before you plant.

Read the fertilizer already in your mix

Check the actual bag before adding a second fertilizer program.

Compare four other edible starter pots

The chart covers spinach, basil, cherry tomato and blueberry. Use it to compare alternatives; their pot sizes and feeding recipes do not apply to this plant.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- University of Maryland: onion spacing, day length, and harvest ↗
  https://extension.umd.edu/resource/growing-onions-home-garden
- Iowa State: transplants, sets, seeds, and onion care ↗
  https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/how-to/all-about-onions
- Illinois Extension: northern and southern onion types ↗
  https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/humble-gardener/2018-03-19-growing-onions-central-illinois
- Espoma: Garden-tone formula and container amounts ↗
  https://www.espoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2020_EO_Garden-tone_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Manufacturer: starter feed in the named potting mix ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/potting-mix/miracle-gro-organic-potting-mix/78951430.html
- Dixondale Farms: day-length choice and stopping fertilizer at bulbing ↗
  https://dixondalefarms.com/faq/
- Minnesota Extension: onion maturity and stopping water ↗
  https://extension.umn.edu/garden-and-home/yard-and-garden/gardening-in-minnesota/growing-onions
- ASPCA: onion and pets ↗
  https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/aspca-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants/onion
- Manufacturer: US fertilizer formula and application directions ↗
  https://www.espoma.com/product/garden-tone/

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

Published September 23, 2026 · Updated September 25, 2026

Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.