



**Organic Seed Potatoes, Fingerlings,  
Onion Sets, Shallots, and Garlic**  
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## **GROWING ALLIUMS SUCCESSFULLY**

Advice and tips from the Maine Potato Lady™

*Over the years, we have developed tried-and-true planting methods for alliums that give us consistent yields and quality. Alliums include garlic, shallots (French and Dutch), potato onions (multipliers), and onions. We're happy to share our experience with you.*

### **When Your Seed Arrives**

Open the package and inspect your order.

Store the garlic bulbs, shallot, potato onions, or onion sets in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight, until planting time.

### **Preparing the Soil for Alliums**

Alliums require adequate nutrition to support a plant big enough for decent bulb production. Add soil amendments to enrich your soil for best yield. Turn into the soil before planting. Amendments appropriate for alliums include:

- *Well-rotted manure or compost.* Spread it about an inch deep over the planting area.
- *Maine Potato Lady Potato and Garlic Fertilizer* tilled in 2 weeks prior to planting.
- *Gypsum (calcium sulphate)* provides the calcium and sulphur all alliums needs. It also loosens the soil and gives it a great texture for optimum growth.
- *Menifee humates (humic acids)* help plants use soil nutrients, both the ones that are naturally present and any supplements you add.
- *Colloidal phosphate* is a good source of phosphorus that is readily absorbed by the plants. It also provides some calcium.
- *Wood ash* is an excellent source of potassium. Alliums do well with it.
- *Greensand or granite meal* are also good sources of potassium.
- *Nitrogen*, in the spring. (See Spring Chores, below).

### **Planting Fall Alliums**

Plant garlic, potato onions and French shallots in the fall 4-6 weeks before the ground freezes. (In Central Maine, we plant around October 25th.)

Just before planting, separate the garlic bulbs into cloves and separate the clusters of shallot or potato onions into sets.

Select only the largest garlic cloves, and use only those that are free from damage or disease. Shallot and potato onion sets should also be free from damage or disease.

Plant individual cloves or sets in a furrow 3"-5" deep, where the cloves or sets are 6"-8" inches apart, and the rows are 8"-10" inches apart.

Be sure that the basal plate (the point from which the roots grow) is facing down and the tip of the clove or set is facing up.

Cover with soil, then cover with 6 inches of straw or hay mulch.

Use one pound of garlic to plant 15-20 row feet, depending on the variety.

Use one pound of onion sets to plant 100 row feet.

Use one pound of shallots or potato onions to plant 7-10 row feet.

### **Planting Spring Alliums**

Plant onion sets, potato onions, or shallots as soon as you can work the soil.

Plant onion transplants 2-4 weeks before your last frost date.

Just before planting, separate the clusters of potato onions or shallots into individual sets.

Select only sets that are free from damage or disease.

Plant individual sets in a furrow 2"-3" deep or press into the soil until the tip is just covered. The sets should be 6"-8" inches apart, and the rows should be 8"-10" inches apart.

Set individual transplants 1"-2" deep so that roots are well covered, water accordingly.

### ***Spring Chores for All Alliums***

When the fall-planted allium tops poke through the mulch about four inches, pull the mulch back. This helps the sun warm the soil and allows any plants that are stuck under the mulch to get growing. Potato onion and shallot tops are not strong enough to push through the mulch.

When the plants are 8"-12" tall, side-dress the alliums with fishmeal or blood meal. Cultivate the amendment into the soil. The cultivation will also help with any weeds that have started to grow.

Replace the mulch around fall-planted alliums, or mulch the spring planted alliums.

### ***Summer Chores for All Alliums***

Keep the mulch thick to preserve moisture, thus reducing the need for irrigation.

Pull any weeds that are growing through the mulch.

Water when rainfall fails to provide 1" per week.

For garlic: When the flower stalks have uncurled, cut them about 2" above the top leaves. This directs the plant's energy toward producing larger bulbs.

### ***Harvesting Your Alliums***

Garlic: When the bottom leaves start senescing (dying back) and there are only 6-7 green leaves left, it is ready to harvest. (In Central Maine, this occurs around August 5th.)

For potato onions, shallots, and onions: When 50% of the tops have fallen over and are dying back, they are ready to harvest. (In Central Maine, this occurs around August 20th.)

Choose a dry day with moderate temperatures.

Pull or lift the plants with a fork.

Remove the plants from the field, but do not leave them in the sun for long. Garlic is easily cooked by the hot August sun.

### ***Curing and Storing Garlic***

To cure the crop, bundle the plants to hang, or lay the plants out on a screen in a barn or shed.

Ensure that the storage area has a good airflow to promote drying and to prevent rotting.

When the roots and tops are quite dry (this may take about a month), cut the tops to about a one-inch length.

Cut the roots and clean any dirt off the wrappers. Be careful not to remove too many of the wrapper leaves, as these provide important protection and will help the bulbs to store longer and in better condition.

Store the bulbs in a cool place (50°-60°F), out of direct light.

### ***Curing and Storing Shallots, Potato Onions, and Onions***

Lay the plants out on screens or boards at least 6" off the ground, in the sun. Arrange the plants so that the tops of one row cover the bulbs of the previous row. This protects the bulbs as they cure.

Cover the onions and shallots at night or when it is raining.

The bulbs are cured when you can pull the dried tops off easily and the necks are small and dry.

Remove only dirty wrapper leaves or any that may be falling off. Onion skins contain enzymes that increase storage and maintain quality.

Store the bulbs in a cold place (38°-45°F), out of direct light.

