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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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Now is the Time to Plant Onions

Now is the time to begin planting onions in the home garden. Onions are a cool season crop and can stand temperatures well below freezing. Onions grow best in full sunlight and well drained soils. Onions can be planted from seed, from small bulbs called sets or from transplants. Seeding is the cheapest but takes longer before onions are ready. If you use sets or transplants, plant them 3/4 inch deep and 3 inches apart. Do not transplant onions more than one inch deep.

When seeding onions for bulbs, plant them 1/4 inch deep during October through December. Place seeds 1 inch apart. When the plants are about 6 inches high, thin them to one plant every 2-3 inches.

Before planting onions, work the soil 8-10 inches deep. Break up the clods and rake the soil smooth. Onions grow best when the garden soil is fertilized right. A soil test submitted to one of the soil testing labs is the best way to determine what fertilizer and the correct amount to apply. In the absence of a soil test, spread 3 - 4 pounds of a fertilizer such as 10-10-10 over a 100 square-foot area. Measure and spread the fertilizer, then mix it with the top 3-4 inches of soil.

When onion plants have 5-6 leaves, apply fertilizer again to help grow larger plants and bigger bulbs. Each leaf forms a ring in the onion bulb. More leaves mean more rings and larger onion bulbs. Use 1.2 cups of fertilizer for each 10 feet of onion row. Scatter the fertilizer evenly between the rows. Water after adding the fertilizer.

Selecting the correct variety of onion is important in the success for a good crop of onions. Some of the better varieties for our area are (yellow): Texas Supersweet 1015Y, Beltsville Bunching, (red) Red Granex, Burgundy, (white) Crystal Wax.

Watering onions once a week usually is enough, but you may need to water more often during dry, windy weather. Water slowly and deeply to help grow strong, healthy roots.

Weeds are easily pulled or cut when they are 3 to 4 inches high. Do not let the weeds or grass get large as they steal nutrients from the onions. When hoeing weeds and grass, do not chop too deeply. You could be cutting onion roots. Always hand pull weeds when possible.

Onions do not have many insect problems, but thrips, which are very tiny insects, may be found between the center leaves. Diseases may be a problem on onions. Brown leaf tips or brown spots on the middle and lower parts of the leaves may be caused by plant diseases.

Onions transplanted in January and February should produce bulbs in May- June. Onions may be picked as green onions from the time they are pencil size until they begin to form bulbs. For dry bulbs onions,

let the plants grow larger. Onions should be harvested when about two-thirds of the tops have fallen over. Careful handling to avoid bruising helps control storage rots and thorough curing increases storage life. Onions can be pulled and left in the field for several days to dry, then cured in a well-ventilated attic or porch for 1 or 2 weeks where they are not in direct sunlight. Tops may be left on or cut off, but leave at least 1 inch of the top when storing.

Onions can be stored dry or pickled and canned; they freeze well if chopped and covered with water. For fresh storage, maintain good air circulation. An effective storage method is to place an onion in a nylon hose, tie a knot and add another onion. When the hose is filled, suspend it from rafters in a storage area.

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