

Grow Hilton Head Sweet Onions

Sweet onions grow best on sandy soils. Onions will grow on clay soils, but expect hotter onions.

Till the soil well, mixing in fertilizer and lime. Use a soil sample to determine fertilizer and lime rates. If you do not have a soil sample, use 1 pound of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet of garden when you first plant the onions.

Sweet onions grow from specific onion varieties! Buy Vidalia onion transplants. Onions grown as Vidalias are generally a Granex variety—a relatively flat, mild onion. The Farm Club will have onions directly from Vidalia, Georgia available the second or third week of November but **you need to order them in October!**

Select transplants that are about the diameter of a pencil. Plant transplants one to two inches deep and 6 inches apart from mid-October to early December, Water them well immediately after planting.

Fertilize onions again in December and January with 1 pound of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet each time. For these early fertilizations, try to find a fertilizer with a sulfur content no higher than 6%. Over-fertilizing with sulfur makes onions hotter and makes them taste less sweet.

After January 31, use fertilizers without sulfur. Fertilizers without sulfur include calcium nitrate, sodium nitrate, or potassium nitrate. Apply these in mid-February and again in early March at $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ pound per 100 square feet. These can be hard to find so contact area garden centers, farm supply stores and hardware stores. If you cannot find one of these, use half rates of ammonium nitrate.

When watering – wait until the soil dries slightly and then apply three-quarter inch of water each time. You can mulch around onions to conserve water and prevent weed growth.

Onions bulb as the day length increases in the spring. Keep onions well watered at this time. They may need up to an inch and three-quarters of water per week at this time.

Harvest onions as the onion necks begin to get soft and tops fall over. This will probably be in late April or early May in Hilton Head.

Clip off the tops and let onions dry well – preferably in a dry, slightly shaded spot. The onions will be ready to store when the necks are dry all the way to the interior. Sweet onions typically do not store well so keep them in a cool, dry spot.

For the information on growing vegetables, contact Hilton Head Farm Club's own Master Gardener Diane Middleton or Steve Pontius.

Happy Gardening!