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Horticulture News

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Onions and Their Cousins

My grandpa used to plant about 2,000 onions in his garden each year. The man liked his onions! Onion growth will be finishing up soon so harvesting can be done soon thereafter.

Watering may be reduced near the harvest period, but regular, timely watering until harvest is essential. Large, vigorous plants are essential for large bulbs with high yields.

When is it time to pull onions? Onions are ready for harvest when the tops begin to weaken and naturally fall over. This is a signal that the bulbs are as big as they will get. Pull or dig the onions and store in a warm, dry, shaded location for 2–4 weeks until the tops and necks are completely dry. After the tops are dry, cut them, trim the roots, and store in a cool dry location. Onions need cool storage, but they should not be stored in a tight plastic bag. An open mesh bag is best for storage. Mild-flavored onions keep for only a month or so. Stronger flavored or more pungent onions keep 3–4 months.

Now for the onion cousins.

*Chives are grown for the green foliage in the spring, summer, and fall. They are usually grown in clumps.

*Garlic is a strong-flavored onion relative that is also grown by planting a division or clove in late summer. After overwintering, the bulbs are ready for harvest in early July when the tops begin to turn yellow.

*Multiplier onions are also divided at the base. They are normally used for green onions in the spring because bulb development is poor and the flavor is strong.

*Leeks require a long cool season for best results. They are usually planted in early spring and dug in late September to mid-October.

*Shallots are smaller than onions and are grown by planting a division or clove. They can be dug in midsummer for storage or used as green onions in the spring.