

# How to Grow Your Own Overwintering Onions

I wrote a blog post on [10 reasons to grow your own onions](#) so if it's something you're now considering, here's how:

*Note: if you're aiming for a year round supply of alliums, overwintering onions will not be ready to harvest until early to mid-summer and don't tend to store as well as onions that are sown in the spring (although they can be diced and frozen).*

They will however, fill the gap (spring planted sets are usually ready late summer to autumn and will store until mid-spring the following year if stored well). Some people grow shallots to fill any gaps as they store very well.



## 1. Find a supply.

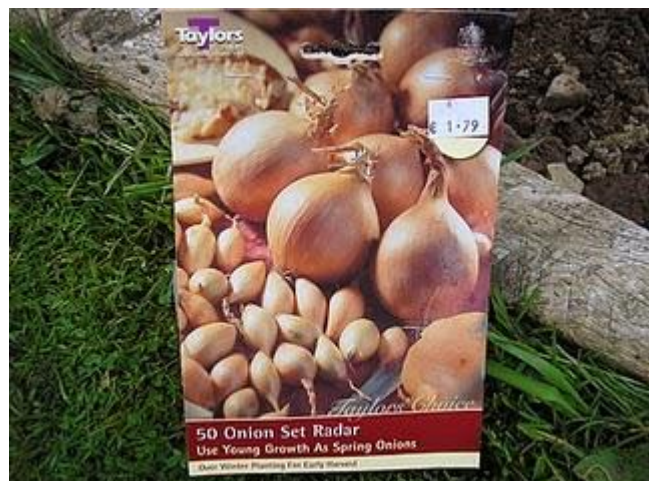
Luckily with the trend in grow your own, finding a supplier is getting easier. I bought two varieties (Radar and Senshyu Yellow) in a local garden centre. Priced at just €1.75 for 50 in 2010, sets are generally considered easier to grow and less prone to disease (although they often bolt or run to seed). Sets are also available on line (see [links](#)).

## 2. Prepare the ground.

Avoid planting onions in soil that's been freshly manured or they will be too lush. These were planted in a patch that had been manured for an earlier crop of potatoes.

Onions also prefer soil that has a fairly neutral pH of 6 to 7 so test it with a pH kit (easy to do, just follow instructions on the packet) and add lime if your soil's very acidic.

Avoid planting onions where they've grown in the last three to four years to prevent pests and diseases.



## 3. Place the onions in position.

Placing all the onions in position and then gently pushing them in tends to be easier. It also gives you a second chance at checking that they're the right way up. The bottom of the bulb is usually flatter and the tip pointed.



Recommended planting depths and distances are generally printed on the packet but if there's not one to hand, plant them about 7-8in apart each way. The two varieties planted here suggested a distance of 5in apart.

#### **4. Plant the sets.**

Onions are sown quite high in the soil, about an inch deep, as opposed to garlic which is planted deeper.

If your soil is quite firm avoid pushing the bulb into it as you may damage it. Use a dibber or a stick to loosen the soil first.

#### **5. Label.**

Once you've planted all your sets, label them with the variety and date and watch them grow.

#### **6. Looking after the crop.**

Keep an eye on the sets and re-plant them if birds dislodge them.



Ensure the soil is kept watered if there's a dry spell and weeded.

In the spring you can add a seaweed-based feed (example here from [The Secret Garden](#)) which is full of nutrients and minerals to give your plants a boost.

#### **7. Pests and Diseases**

If you're prone to onion fly (where small maggots attack the seedlings), you can grow them under fine netting. Unfortunately you won't know you're prone until you've experienced them!

There are no organic remedies for mildews and rots of onions (which will be worse in damp weather) that I'm aware of.



#### **8. Harvesting**

You can lift and use the onions as you need them once they're a reasonable size. If you're hoping to store them, wait until the foliage dies down and the tops bend naturally (see [blog post](#) for harvesting information).