



What are Off-Season Onions ?



*Onion seedlings ready
for off-season planting*

In Nepal, farmers usually start planting onions from seed in October, and transplant in November. This means that when April comes the crop is ready, and for a short period the bazaar is full of onions. And that means at this time, the price of onions is low. As a result, it's more difficult for farmers to gain a good income from selling onions. However, before and after this time, the price of onions is 2 or 3 times higher. Then, onions need to be imported from outside the country. How fine it would be for farmers to get such good prices for their crops. One way of making more from onion growing is by *off-season* onion production.

This booklet gives information on how to grow onions to sell over an extended period. Note that months are described for the northern hemisphere, and need to be adapted for the southern hemisphere.

Why grow off-season Onions ?

Benefits of growing off-season onions

- when onions are less available, they can be sold at higher prices;
- by growing onions out of season, you save having to buy them at higher prices;
- onions are a nutritious vegetable, and it's good to eat them from time to time. By growing them out of season, you can eat onions more regularly;
- in the off-season method, onion bulbs are planted at the end of the monsoon when there is still moisture in the soil. This means that poorer farmers without irrigation can benefit more from producing off-season onions,



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How to grow off-season Onions ?

New types of seed aren't needed to grow off-season onions. You can use whatever types you are used to planting, or are locally available.

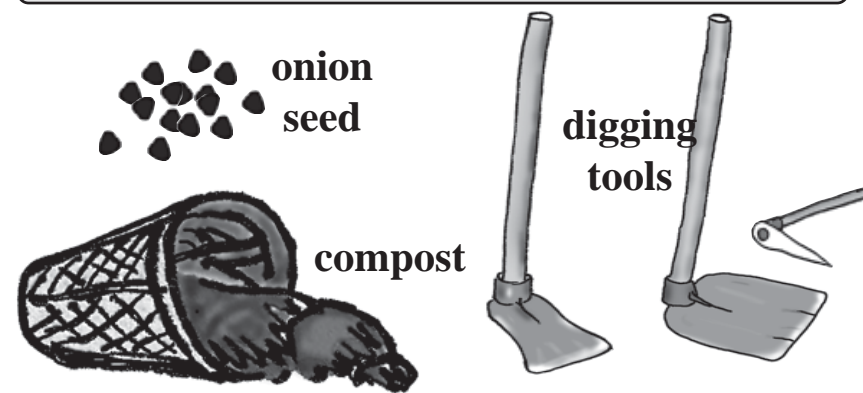
1. When ?

Onion seed is planted between October and December. Use the same method to plant seed as in normal onion growing. You can also start a little earlier, in September.

2. Where ?

Firstly you need a nursery to sow the onion seed in. Choose a place where the seedlings can be protected and cared for easily. The onion seedlings can be transplanted into the kitchen garden. If grown on a large scale, a transplant bed is also needed, according to the needs of the farmer.

Materials Needed to grow off-season onions



3. Sowing the seed

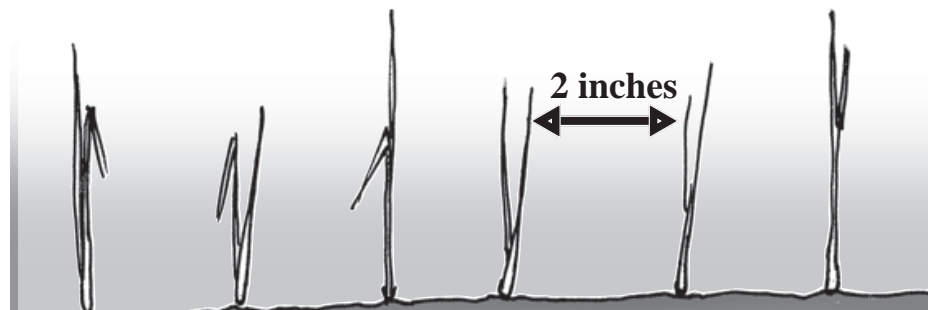
Before sowing onion seed, soaking it in water helps to speed up germination. Change the water twice daily and after 2-3 days a tiny white root will appear. As soon as this happens, sow the seed in the nursery.

After sowing, cover the seed with fine, fertile soil. Mixing ash and ground oil seed cake with the soil provides fertility, and also helps to protect against pests in the soil. Then, cover the soil with a fine mulch. As the onion seedlings grow, irrigate and weed as needed.



4. Transplanting the seedlings

After about a month in the nursery, the seedlings are transplanted so they are a distance of about 2 inches apart. The seedlings will be about 3-6 inches tall. The nursery bed can also be used by leaving seedlings at the required distance after transplanting the others.



These seedlings will grow in the transplant nursery for a further 2 months, and need to be weeded and watered as required.

Let's See

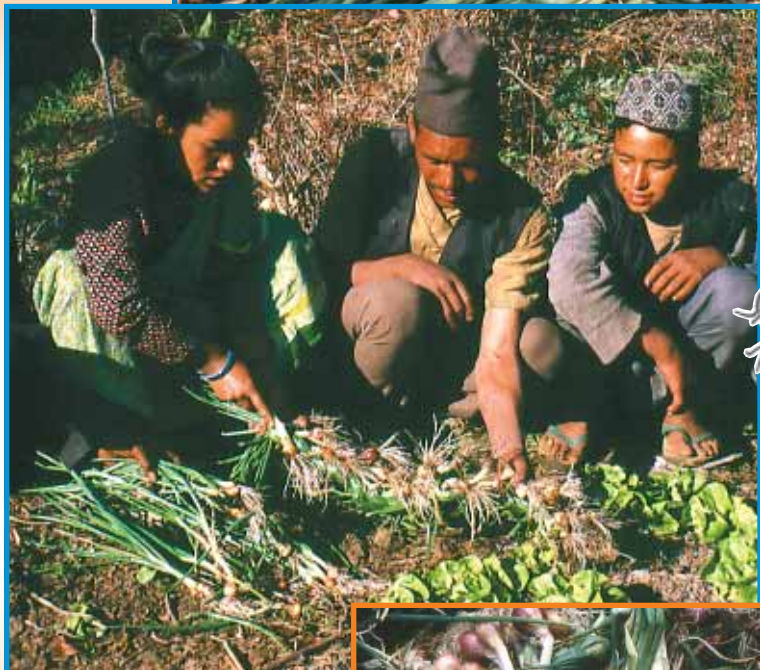
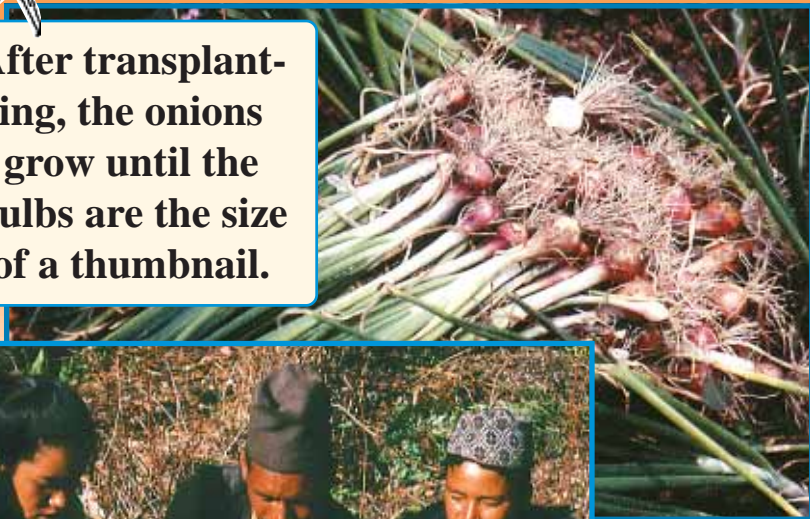
How to grow off-season onions



Shown here is the onion seed germinating. In the lower photo the seedlings are ready for transplanting



After transplanting, the onions grow until the bulbs are the size of a thumbnail.



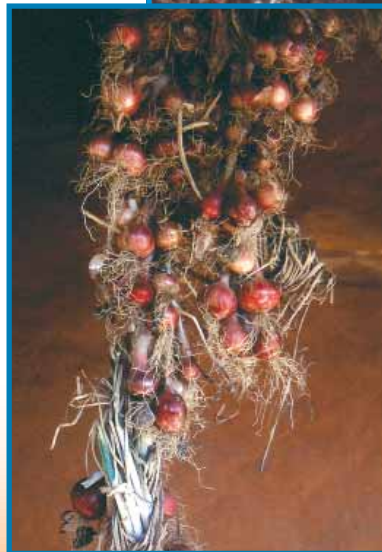
Then the bulbs are lifted and plaited together as shown

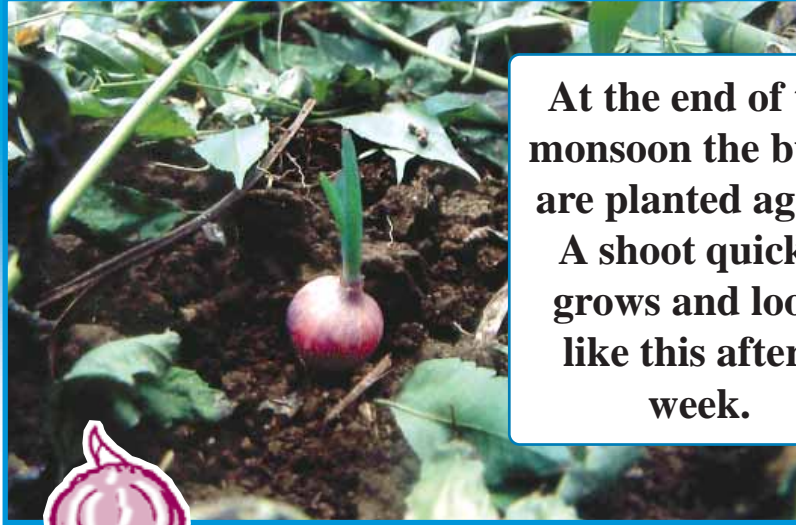


The plaited strings of onions are hung up in a dry, airy and shaded place



They can be left like this for 4-5 months





At the end of the monsoon the bulbs are planted again. A shoot quickly grows and looks like this after a week.



As in normal onion growing, bending over the leaves helps to produce bigger onions bulbs.

5. When the onion bulbs are the size of a thumbnail, they are ready to lift (uproot). The bulb should be firm. After lifting, plait the leaves together to make a long string of bulbs 18-24 inches long. There may be 50-60 bulbs in a string.

The string is hung in a shaded, dry and well-aired place.

6. The string can be left hanging for the whole of the monsoon. At the end of the monsoon unplait the string and plant the bulbs separately in the vegetable garden.



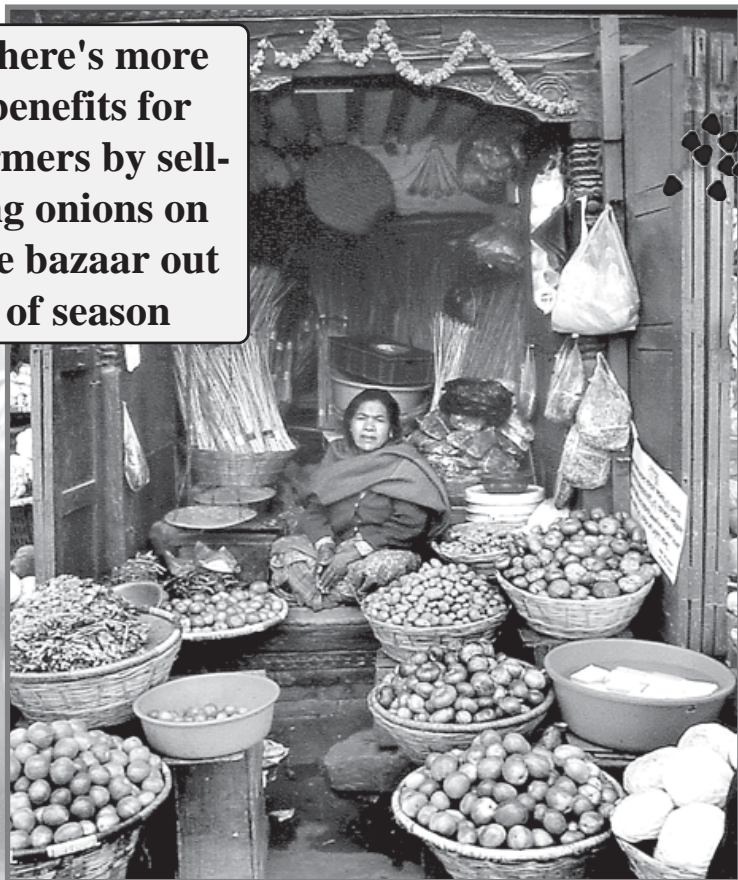
The off-season onions can be mixed with other vegetable varieties in the garden. More information about this is given in the booklets *Mixed Vegetable Gardening* and *Kitchen Garden*. Planting the bulbs in September means the onions will be fully grown in November. This is the time when onions are not easily available so the market price is higher



Occasional irrigation is needed to grow onion seedlings. But by planting at the end of the monsoon there is still plenty of moisture left in the soil. If there is a lack of irrigation, groups of farmers can get together to grow seedlings in one place where water is available, such as below a community tap stand. Then, the bulbs are distributed among the farmers for storage individually. After the monsoon, everyone can then plant onion bulbs and produce a good crop without the need for irrigation.

It's also easy to produce seed from onions grown in this way. Simply select the best plants, and let them grow to seed.

There's more benefits for farmers by selling onions on the bazaar out of season



Farmers' Experience

Mr Bal Bahadur Regmi

From Nepal, Surkhet district, Gumi - 2, Shera village, Mr Bal Bahadur Regmi has produced his own off-season onions. Now let's hear about his experience.



Bal Bahadur Regmi

“ I've grown off-season onions since 1997 and I like the method very much. After sowing the seed in December, I leave the seedlings to grow into firm bulbs the size of my thumbnail, then lift them and hang them plaited together in a shaded and airy place. Then in September I make beds and plant the bulbs again. At that time, the soil is moist from the monsoon, so I don't need to irrigate. The onions are then ready to eat and sell in November. This method is really easy and I can eat onions when there's normally none available. And because there are no other onions available, they're more expensive. You can also save seed using this method. Nowadays others in the village have started to use this method. We produce seedlings on our farm, and distribute the bulbs to other farmers to continue the method of planting the bulbs on their own land. ”





Read On !



Subjects Related to Growing Off-Season Onions

Good benefits can be had from the information in this book about growing off-season onions. However, this information is also linked to other methods. For extra benefits let's read, learn and practice from other related booklets.



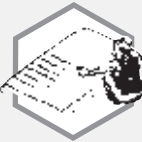
Kitchen Garden and Mixed Vegetable Growing booklets

How to make and manage a home vegetable garden for permanence, ease and simplicity ? These booklets give information on how to do less work for more production, while also being able to produce a wide range of fresh vegetables.



Home Nursery booklet

Different plant species have different ways of propagation. This booklet tells how to easily grow many types of plant for home use.



Seed Saving booklet

This booklet gives information on methods to produce and store various quality seeds at home.

