

Onion information kit

Reprint – information current in 1997



REPRINT INFORMATION – PLEASE READ!

For updated information please call 13 25 23 or visit the website www.deedi.qld.gov.au

This publication has been reprinted as a digital book without any changes to the content published in 1997. We advise readers to take particular note of the areas most likely to be out-of-date and so requiring further research:

- Chemical recommendations—check with an agronomist or Infopest www.infopest.qld.gov.au
- Financial information—costs and returns listed in this publication are out of date. Please contact an adviser or industry body to assist with identifying more current figures.
- Varieties—new varieties are likely to be available and some older varieties may no longer be recommended. Check with an agronomist, call the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23, visit our website www.deedi.qld.gov.au or contact the industry body.
- Contacts—many of the contact details may have changed and there could be several new contacts available. The industry organisation may be able to assist you to find the information or services you require.
- Organisation names—most government agencies referred to in this publication have had name changes. Contact the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation to find out the current name and contact details for these agencies.
- Additional information—many other sources of information are now available for each crop. Contact an agronomist, Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation for other suggested reading.

Even with these limitations we believe this information kit provides important and valuable information for intending and existing growers.

This publication was last revised in 1997. The information is not current and the accuracy of the information cannot be guaranteed by the State of Queensland.

This information has been made available to assist users to identify issues involved in onion production. This information is not to be used or relied upon by users for any purpose which may expose the user or any other person to loss or damage. Users should conduct their own inquiries and rely on their own independent professional advice.

While every care has been taken in preparing this publication, the State of Queensland accepts no responsibility for decisions or actions taken as a result of any data, information, statement or advice, expressed or implied, contained in this publication.



Queensland Government



Common **QUESTIONS**

This section contains the most commonly asked questions about growing onions. The answers are as brief as possible. Where this is difficult and more detail is required, reference is made to other sections of the kit. Symbols on the left of the page will help you make these links.

Contents

Varieties	2
Planting.....	2
Weed control.....	3
Pests and diseases	3
Fertilising.....	4
Harvesting.....	4
Marketing	4
General.....	5

Varieties

What variety should I plant?

The variety you choose depends on the planting time and whether the onions will be used in fresh salads or for cooking. Early Lockyer and Gladalan varieties are salad-type onions that have a short shelf life. The Golden Brown is a much firmer onion with better keeping qualities and is preferred for export.



Variety selection
information
Section 3 page 5

Why do we plant different varieties at different times?

Queensland onions are mainly salad-type onions. The choice of variety for a particular planting date is critical because bulb formation is sensitive to temperature and daylength. To produce a high yielding crop, plant the right variety at the right crop density and at the correct time (daylength) for a particular location. Because there are too many combinations of conditions to list here, we refer you to the variety selection table.

What is the difference between shallots and spring onions?

Shallots are a species of the onion family. Spring onions sold in Australia are usually immature white onions of strains of Early Lockyer White.

What are red onions?

Red onions are a fresh-market type onion used mainly for decorative purposes and in salads. There is a small market for red onions. The major variety is Red Rojo.

Planting

Should I grow onions on beds?

Yes, particularly on heavy soils where drainage could be a problem.

What row and plant spacing should I aim for?

A common plant spacing is 75 millimetres between plants in rows 300 mm apart. This high planting density will give best yields, however, planting space can affect disease control and the size and shape of the onion to be marketed. A uniform plant stand is required to produce bulbs of similar shape and size.



Planting Section 3
pages 8–11

more info



Weed control
Section 3
pages 11,15,17



a key issue



For details on
downy mildew
Section 4 page 30

Weed control

Should I use a pre-emergent weedicide?

Yes, if you believe you may have a serious weed problem.

What post-emergent weedicides can I use?

There are many weedicides available. The one selected will depend on the type of weeds present and the growth stage of the onion plants. You need to check Tables 3, 4 and 5 in Section 3 for detailed information. Read the label to find out what weeds the chemical controls.

Pests and diseases

Are diseases a problem?

Yes. There are two major diseases of onion: white rot, a soil-borne disease and downy mildew, a leaf disease.

How do I control white rot?

Avoid known infected areas. Apply a chemical spray as a band over the row at planting and irrigate well so that the chemical reaches the seed. Follow this with another band spray in June. Select a suitable chemical from the *Problem solver handy guide* and follow the label directions.

How do I control downy mildew?

Downy mildew can be controlled by fungicide sprays. Select a suitable chemical from the *Problem solver handy guide* and follow the label directions. Follow the downy mildew resistance strategy. This is a major problem so we are referring you to other sections of this kit.

What insect pests should I worry about?

The most important pest of onions is onion thrips which feed on the leaves. Armyworms and cutworms can cause serious damage in the early growth stages.

Fertilising

What fertilisers should I use and when should I apply them?

Onions do need fertiliser but what type and how much depends on the soil type and the cropping history of the field. The timing of the fertiliser application is also important. All fertilising should be based on the results of a soil or leaf analysis.



Fertiliser
recommendations
Section 3 pages 9,18

Should I use foliar fertilisers?

Foliar fertilisers are not usually recommended, except where there has been some temporary setback in growth, for example after heavy rain has leached fertiliser out of the root zone.

Harvesting

When are onions ready to harvest?

The correct stage is when 80% of the tops have fallen.



Labelling regulations
Section 3 page 26

Is mechanical harvesting possible?

Yes, but it is not normally used in Queensland. It depends on the variety and soil type.

Marketing

What size and type of bag do I use to market onions?

Onions are sold in 20 kg mesh bags and sometimes in 10 and 18 kg cartons.

What are the labelling requirements for onions?

There are specific requirements, including grower's name, road address and net weight of the bag. Lettering on the labels must be legible and at least 6 mm high. You can buy bags already labelled with your details.

Do I need to cure onions?

Yes, to obtain a marketable product.

How do I cure onions?

Onions are not usually cured in the field in Queensland because the air is too moist, so artificial drying is usually required. This is done by fan forcing heated air through the stacked bins in a specially designed room.



Interstate quarantine regulations
Section 3 page 28

Are there any restrictions on the sale of onions throughout Australia?

There are no restrictions at present into New South Wales but the other states do have restrictions usually concerning soil. Victoria has restrictions on the entry of spring onions. Before consigning onions, check the quarantine requirements of your proposed market.

Is there an export opportunity for onions?

Yes. There is a limited market for export onions, mainly to the nearby Pacific Islands. Other larger markets need developing.

General

Onion prices were high last year, should I grow them?

Onion prices fluctuate wildly from year to year and even within the year. Production costs are high so new growers are advised to plant only a small area until they gain experience.

How important is water quality?

Water quality is more important in the young seedling stage and depends on the environmental conditions present at that stage. Water conductivity (salt content) should be less than 1200 microSiemens per centimetre (mS/cm) but levels up to 1800 mS/cm can be tolerated after seedling establishment.

What type of soil do I need to grow onions?

Well drained clay loams are preferred but onions are tolerant of a wide range of soils, from sandy loams to heavy clays.

Can I grow processing onions and is there a market for them?

There is a limited choice of varieties suitable for growing processing onions. Make sure that you have a market for the onions before growing them.



Growing the crop
Section 3
pages 10, 13

Why have I got a poor plant stand?

The more important things that can result in a poor plant stand are:

- poor quality seed
- incorrect planting depths
- poor quality irrigation water
- incorrect irrigation management after planting.

Is greening a problem?

Yes, it is more pronounced in the white onion varieties. Markets can reject 'green' onions.

Why have I got seed heads?

The wrong variety was probably planted for that planting time.

What makes me cry when I peel onions?

Volatile chemicals that irritate the tear ducts are released when the onion is cut. Pre-cool onions or peel them under water to avoid this.