

RED ONIONS OR SHALLOT, ONIONS AND GARLIC

BY

Mr. W. MOLEGODE
 AGRICULTUREAL OFFICER (PROPAGANDA)

RED ONIONS, CURRY ONIONS OR SHALLOT (*ALLIUM ASCOLONIUM*)

THIS crop should be grown in an open situation free of heavy shade. It can be most successfully grown under irrigation in the dry zone and during both seasons in the moderately wet zones if timed so that the crop matures in dry weather. In fact it is at present grown almost throughout the year except in the very dry period of January-February and August-September.

The most suitable soil is a rich light moist soil of loose texture ; but with proper drainage and an application of well rotted farm yard manure or compost most Ceylon soils will give a successful crop of Red Onions.

The soil should be dug to a depth of 4 or 5 inches and turned over. The manure is evenly applied at the rate of at least 10 tons per acre where available and is dug in and the soil is reduced to a tilth. Beds are now formed, levelled and beaten down to make them firm.

Propagation is by either seeds or seed bulbs. The former is economical as only 8 to 10 lbs. of seed are required to plant an acre. If seed bulbs are employed as much as 750 to 800 lbs. of bulbs will be required.

Mark out very shallow drills 6 inches apart on the beds. Sow the seed thinly in the drills and cover lightly and press down. In dry weather apply water regularly, using a can with a fine rose. In three weeks the plants will grow about 3 or 4 inches high. Then begin to thin out the plants in the drills leaving a plant 4 inches apart in the drill. The excess seedlings can be transplanted elsewhere. Before thinning out the plants, give a good watering and soften the soil to enable the seedlings to be removed without injury to the plants.

If the crop is to be raised by seed bulbs select medium sized bulbs. Cut off the apex of each bulb removing about a quarter of the bulb. This ensures even growth. Now plant in rows 6 inches apart placing a bulb 4 inches apart in the row and burying just deep enough so that the cut surface of the bulb be just above the soil or in level with the soil.

Weed and lightly cultivate the surface soil. It is important not to let the soil so dry during the growing stage.

Red Onions respond wonderfully to manuring. A top dressing of poultry manure or goat dung lightly forked in after 6 weeks of planting or a weak liquid manure will give excellent results.

When raised from seeds the crop takes from 4 to 4½ months to mature. If bulbs are planted the crop is ready in three months and irrigated crops may mature in less than three months.

When bulbs are planted in 6 to 7 weeks immature bulbs and leaves can be utilised as a vegetable.

As the bulbs mature the leaves turn yellow wither and fall. Then the crop is lifted. The lifting should preferably be done in dry weather. After removing any adhering earth dry the bulbs and any remaining leaves under the shade for a few days so that the outer scales may dry. The roots and leaves are then removed and the bulbs are again dried by spreading them out in a well ventilated room till sufficiently dry. Properly dried Red Onions can be kept for three or four months.

The yield from seed is 50 to 60 cwts. per acre. From bulbs it may be anything from 8 to 25 fold.

ONIONS (*ALLIUM CEPA*)

The cultural methods and after treatment for onions are almost similar to those adopted for the Red Onions. But onions cannot be successfully raised in all parts of the country where the Red Onion succeed. Onions can be successfully grown only in the higher elevations where there is a cool and dry climate.

Prepare the soil as for the Red Onion. As bulb planting is costly it is advisable to grow from seed. Onion seed lose vitality soon. Secure a fresh supply of onion seed and raise seedlings in a nursery and transplant, or sow direct in drills varying from 9 to 12 inches apart according to the variety. When the plants are 3 to 4 inches apart them out in the rows to 6 to 9 inches apart. The seedlings removed can be transplanted.

Keep free of weeds and water when necessary. Stir the top soil on the surface and give an application of liquid manure. The under soil should be kept firm and compact.

Sometimes when the bulbs are fully developed the leaves are bent down to wither and hasten maturity.

After lifting dry the onions in the shade for a day or two. What may be done is to hang the onions in bunches in an airy situation and allow them to dry.

Allow some of the best plants to flower and run to seed.

Half an ounce of seed can be drilled in 100 feet.

Several types of onions are imported to Ceylon. Large and small red varieties, large and small whitish and yellowish types, large and small silvery white varieties.

Avoid growing onions on the same land too often.

GARLIC (*ALLIUM SATIVUM*)

Garlic can be successfully grown in the higher cooler elevations like Welimada, Palugama, Haputale, Ohiya, parts of Walpane, Udahehaheta for the crop requires a cool moist period during growth and a relatively dry period during maturing of the crop. In the mid country garlic can be grown but the results are poor.

Prepare the soil as for onions. Form beds, reduce the surface soil to a fine tilth. Press down the soil.

Garlic is propagated by means of the bulbils or cloves that make up a garlic bulb. The white membrane enclosing the bulbils or cloves must be first removed to separate the bulbils or cloves. They are then sorted. The long and slender ones should be rejected. It will be an advantage to plant in each bed cloves of uniform size so that they may mature evenly.

Planting should be in rows 9 inches apart placing individual cloves upright by lightly pressing with the soil with the apex just below to surface at 4 inches apart in the rows.

When the cloves start to grow the surface soil should be kept loose. Remove all weeds. Don't let the soil go dry. Lack of moisture in the soil will retard the development of the bulbs.

A top dressing of powdered cattle dung or an occasional application of weak liquid of fresh cattle dung will result in a considerable increase of the crop.

Garlic generally takes about four months to be ready for lifting but it may, if the conditions are unfavourable, take longer to mature.

When the leaves have turned yellow the crop is ready for lifting. After lifting remove any adhering soil and leave the bulbs to dry.

Sometimes the bulbs are dried with the leaves on, and are bound and hung in the kitchen.