



## Guide to Growing Success

# SEED POTATOES & ONION SETS

Getting started with seed potatoes and onion sets is one of the most rewarding parts of the gardening season... and at Gertens, we've got everything you need to *grow your own, with confidence.*



# All About Potatoes

## Everyone's Favorite Tuber

Potatoes are one of the most versatile and rewarding crops you can grow—and they're a staple in many Minnesota gardens for good reason. Instead of growing from traditional seeds, potatoes are planted using seed tubers, which are small whole potatoes or cut pieces that sprout and develop into new plants. Originally native to the Andes Mountains, potatoes have adapted to a wide range of climates and now come in an exciting mix of colors, textures, and culinary uses.

From fluffy, starchy russets perfect for baking, to smooth red potatoes and creamy yellow varieties, to eye-catching purples and fingerlings, there's truly a potato for every garden and every kitchen. At Gertens, we carry a carefully selected assortment of seed potatoes so you can choose varieties that match your taste and growing goals.

**Setting your potatoes up for success starts with the soil.** Potatoes thrive in loose, well-drained soil—ideally with a sandy texture that allows tubers to expand easily without becoming misshapen. Heavy or compacted soil can lead to poor yields and increased risk of disease. If your soil needs improvement, mixing in compost or organic matter is one of the best ways to boost both drainage and fertility. You'll find everything you need at Gertens to build that strong foundation.

Potatoes prefer slightly acidic soil, with a pH between 6.0 and 6.5, but they're fairly adaptable and can tolerate slightly lower levels. One important thing to remember is that potatoes are heavy feeders, meaning they require more nutrients than many other vegetables in your garden. Regular fertilizing—especially with nitrogen—helps promote strong plant growth and better tuber development.

As your plants grow, consistent care makes all the difference. Proper watering (keeping soil evenly moist but not soggy), hilling soil around the stems, and feeding at key growth stages will all help maximize your harvest. And while potatoes are relatively easy to grow, giving them a little extra attention compared to other crops will reward you with a more abundant and higher-quality yield.

# Planting Potatoes

## Prepping your seed potatoes:

- Small tubers can be planted whole
- Larger ones should be cut into chunks (about 1 – 1 ¼ inches), each with at least one “eye”
- Let cut pieces dry for a few days to form a protective layer

## Planting basics (perfect timing for Minnesota gardeners!):

- Plant in early spring once soil warms (April in the Twin Cities area)
- Space 10–12 inches apart, 3–5 inches deep
- Rows should be 30–36 inches apart
- Cover with soil or compost and water well

## Hilling & Feeding

As your plants grow, gently mound soil around the stems—this is called hilling.

- Start when plants are about 12 inches tall
- Repeat once or twice during the season
- This encourages more potatoes to form and prevents greening

Feed your plants along the rows about 4 weeks after planting, then again 2 weeks later. Gertens carries vegetable-specific fertilizers that make this step simple and effective.

For more information visit our blog!  
[gertens.com/learn](https://www.gertens.com/learn)

# All About Onions

## A Garden & Kitchen Staple

Onions are a must-have in the garden and the kitchen, bringing flavor, versatility, and excellent storage potential to your harvest. Part of the allium family—which includes garlic, leeks, chives, and shallots—onions are well-suited for Minnesota growing conditions when you choose the right type & give them the care they need.

In our region, most gardeners grow long-day onions, which require 14 or more hours of daylight to properly form bulbs. This makes them a perfect match for Minnesota's long summer days. While sweet or short-day onions can be grown here, they typically produce smaller bulbs due to the shorter daylight requirements they're adapted to.

Onions grow best in full sun and loose, well-drained soil that's rich in organic matter. A soil pH between 6.0 and 7.0 is ideal. Before planting, it's helpful to work in compost or well-aged manure to improve soil structure and nutrient availability—both of which are key for developing strong, healthy bulbs. *(Fresh manure should be avoided, as it can introduce disease and weeds.)*

When it comes to feeding onions, balance is everything. They need a steady supply of nutrients—especially nitrogen early in the season—to support leafy top growth, which directly impacts bulb size. However, too much nitrogen later in the season can lead to soft bulbs and poor storage quality. That's why many gardeners choose to side-dress with fertilizer once or twice during the growing season to keep plants on track.

Onions can be grown from seed, transplants, or sets, giving you flexibility based on your experience level and timeline. Onion sets—small bulbs grown the previous year—are a popular choice for their ease and reliability, and they're a great option if you're looking for a simple way to get started. Gertens offers a wide selection each spring, making it easy to jump right into the growing season.

With consistent watering, proper spacing, and a little mid-season care, onions are a low-maintenance crop that delivers big rewards—both fresh from the garden and in long-term storage.

# Feeding Your Onion Crop

Onions need steady nutrition, especially nitrogen—but balance is key.

- Too little = poor growth
- Too much = soft bulbs that don't store well

Use a balanced fertilizer and side-dress once or twice during the season. Our team at Gertens can help you choose the right fertilizer for your soil and garden goals.

## Planting Onions

You've got a few options:

### From seed:

- Plant as soon as soil is workable
- Sow shallow ( $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep)
- Thin seedlings to 3–4 inches apart

### From transplants:

- Plant in spring when temps reach  $\sim 50^{\circ}\text{F}$
- Space 3–4 inches apart

### From sets (the easiest option!):

- Plant small bulbs directly in early spring
- A great choice for quick, reliable results, Gertens carries a wide selection each season

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# Growing in Small Spaces

## Short on Space? No Problem.

You don't need a large backyard to enjoy the satisfaction of growing your own food—just a sunny spot and a little creativity. Container gardening opens the door for anyone to grow fresh potatoes and onions, whether you're working with a patio, balcony, or small corner of your yard. At Gertens, we love helping gardeners think outside the traditional garden bed and find simple, flexible ways to grow more in the space they have.

Grow bags and containers are especially popular because they're lightweight, easy to manage, and perfect for maximizing limited space. Many are even made from recycled materials, making them a sustainable choice you can feel good about. Plus, their portability means you can move your plants throughout the season to chase the best sunlight or protect them from unexpected weather.

### Potato grow bag tips:

- Choose a bag that holds at least 10 gallons of soil for best results
- Use a high-quality mix of potting soil and compost (a 50/50 blend works great—and you'll find both at Gertens)
- Start with a few inches of soil, add your seed potatoes, then cover and water well
- As plants grow, continue adding soil to "hill" them, just like you would in the ground
- Place in a location with 6–8 hours of full sun and easy access to water

One of the biggest benefits? Harvesting is incredibly simple—just tip the bag over and gather your potatoes without the digging. It's a fun, low-effort way to grow, especially for beginners or families gardening together.

# Pests & Problems

## Managing Your Crop

A healthy garden starts with strong plants, but even the best-maintained potatoes and onions can occasionally run into issues. From insects and disease to environmental stress, a variety of factors can affect how your plants grow and produce. The key is catching problems early and understanding what you're seeing so you can respond effectively.

Changes in leaf color, holes in foliage, wilting, or unusual spots on bulbs or tubers are often the first signs that something isn't quite right. Sometimes these issues are caused by pests, while other times they may be related to weather conditions, soil health, or watering practices. Taking a closer look—and making an accurate diagnosis—is the first step toward finding the right solution.

At Gertens, we're here to help you troubleshoot with confidence. Whether you bring in a sample, a photo, or just a description, our team can help identify the issue and recommend the right products or practices to get your garden back on track. With the right care and a little guidance, most common problems can be managed before they significantly impact your harvest.

Common potato concerns:

- Colorado potato beetles (leaf damage)
- Aphids (sticky, curled leaves)
- Blight (leaf spots)
- Scab (cosmetic tuber damage—still edible!)

Common onion concerns:

- Onion maggots (wilting plants)
- Rot diseases (especially in wet conditions)

If something looks off, bring a sample or photo to Gertens—our team is always happy to help diagnose and recommend solutions.

# Harvest Tips

Make the most of your hard work!

There's nothing quite like the moment you harvest what you've grown—it's the reward for all your early spring planning, planting, and care. Whether you're pulling up your first potatoes or curing a batch of onions for storage, harvest time is when your garden truly comes full circle. With just a few simple techniques, you can make the most of your crop and enjoy fresh, homegrown flavor long after the growing season ends.

## Harvesting Potatoes:

- For tender "new potatoes," harvest a few weeks after plants begin flowering
- For full-sized potatoes, wait until the foliage yellows and dies back
- Gently dig or lift from the soil to avoid cutting or bruising tubers
- Let potatoes dry briefly before storing, but avoid long sun exposure which can cause greening

## Harvesting Onions:

- Onions are ready when tops fall over and begin to dry out
- Harvest on a dry, cool day to reduce the risk of rot
- Gently pull or loosen from the soil and shake off excess dirt

## Curing & Storage:

- Allow onions to cure in a warm, dry, well-ventilated space for 1–2 weeks
- Once cured, trim tops and roots and store in a cool, dry place
- Properly cured onions will store longer and maintain better flavor

Taking a little extra time at harvest makes a big difference in how well your produce stores and tastes. And if you're unsure whether it's the right time to harvest or how to store your crop, the Gertens team is always here with tips, tools, and supplies to help you get the most out of your garden.

Whether you're planting your first row or expanding your garden, starting with strong seed potatoes and onion sets—and the right supplies—makes all the difference. Stop by Gertens to explore our selection and get growing!

For more information visit our blog!  
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