

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Scallions/Spring Onions



Scallions are a member of the *Allium* family, joining garlic, leeks, shallots and onions. They can be used to add a bit of colour or a garnish to a dish but are often overlooked for their nutritional value and overshadowed by other ingredients. Like others in the family, scallions contain sulphuric compounds designed to protect them from predators.

The word *scallion* is derived from the Greek *askolonion*, referring to an ancient Palestinian port considered the home of the onion. However, it is now known that onions are native to Asia. The word *shallot* is also derived from the word *askolonion*, meaning *scallion* in Australia, Canada and the UK.

Although believed to originate in Asia, seeds of the onion plant have been discovered in Egyptian tombs dating 3200 B.C. According to the National Onion Association, King Ramses IV was entombed with onion bulbs in his eye sockets, possibly because some ancients believed onion scent carried magical powers to prompt the dead to breathe again.

When starting from seed, consider planting indoors five or six weeks before the last frost or waiting until the soil begins warming before sowing directly in your garden. Plant the seeds thickly one to one and a half inches deep, whether in the garden or in a flat indoors.

Like other types of onions, scallion seeds may germinate slowly and poorly. The plants require constant moisture in a well-draining soil, so they are not sitting in a puddle of water. When starting indoors, harden them off as the roots begin to fill the cell pack.

Hardening gives the seedlings time to become accustomed to the outdoors. Start on a mild day with two to three hours of sun exposure, adding a few hours every day. If the temperature drops below 40 degrees Fahrenheit, bring them indoors. Scallions have a shallow root system, so it is important to keep them watered after planting in the garden.

You may enjoy a continual harvest by succession planting every three to four weeks. Adding a side dressing of organic fertiliser helps to keep them green and growing throughout the summer. Your crop will also appreciate being kept weed-free. If you are growing perennial scallions, apply a layer of mulch in the Autumn, then remove in the spring for an earlier crop.

Once harvested, you may re-root your scallions indoors, leaving a couple of inches of the stem attached to the roots and adding them to a couple of inches of water in a glass. Make sure the roots are pointing down and the stems are pointing up. Change the water every two to three days.

Within seven to ten days you will have another set of green tops, but the plant is not done yet. Keep the scallions in a glass of water near a source of sunlight and you will enjoy a couple more harvests from the same plant.