

# How to Grow Shallots

## **Introduction:**

Shallots are native to the Middle East and are a botanical variety (or cultivar) of the onion. The name comes from Ashkelon, an ancient Canaanite city, where classical era Greeks believed the shallots originated.

It is possible to grow shallots from seed but they are normally bought as sets. Each set produces off-sets which when ready to harvest have formed a ring of some 4 to 9 full size shallots.

There are basically 3 types of shallot - red, yellow and French Jersey types which have a longer shape. A favourite red shallot is Red Sun which has a beautiful red skin and white flesh. For a yellow variety Golden Gourmet is a long time favourite as it is resistant to bolting and stores well. Zebrune is a French heritage variety which has recently been revived and is also known as "Cuisse de Poulet de Poitou" or Banana Shallot. Zebrune shallots produce long brown bulbs tinged with pink and have a good resistance to bolting. These can be planted between February and April and harvested between September and October. Like all shallots these can be grown from seed but produce one large shallot rather than a bunch as do other shallots. They are highly prized for gourmet cooking.

## **Cultivation:**

**Preparing the Soil.** Shallots are undemanding and low maintenance to grow and will produce a good crop in a firm, well-drained soil in full sun. (They will not grow well on an acid soil). If the soil has been rotovated or dug "heel & toe" to tread the soil firm before planting. A week before planting rake in 60grams per square metre of a general fertiliser such as fish, blood & bone or Growmore.

## **Planting**

Traditionally shallots are planted like garlic on the shortest day and harvested on the longest day but practically should be planted in February but can be planted as late as the end of March and still produce a good crop.

When planting be sure not to just push the set into the firm earth as this can damage the root. Using your trowel dig a hole as deep as the set. Place the set in the hole, cover with the loose soil leaving just the tip visible. Birds can be a problem with newly planted sets therefore it is best to cover with fleece until well rooted. Another option is to cover the ground with weed suppressing membrane then plant the shallots through slits. This not only avoids damaging the bulb it also cuts down on weeding. Any weeding should be done by hand as a hoe could damage the shallow rooted shallot.

Water during dry spells every 14 days and give an occasional feed with a general liquid fertiliser. Stop watering mid-summer once shallot bulbs are swollen as watering spring planted sets means they store less successfully. Try to avoid over-head watering as this can encourage fungal diseases.

## **Pests and Problems.**

**Onion White Rot** - a soil borne virus that causes wilting of foliage above ground while rotting the roots and invading the bulb below. There is no chemical cure

**Onion Downy Mildew** - a fungal disease damaging both foliage and roots resulting in poor yields. This can be caused by damp conditions therefore ensure plenty of light and air around plant by planting at the correct spacing and weeding regularly. Avoid over-head watering. Remove any infected leaves.

**Leek Rust** - Fungal disease causing bright yellow spots on leaves. Made worse in long wet spells. No control for rust. Don't overcrowd plants. Dispose of affected plant material. Do not grow garlic, leeks, shallots or onions in the same spot for 3 years.

## **Harvesting**

Shallots store well and 12 months isn't unusual. When your crop is ready for lifting - they tend to be loose in the soil at this stage - always use a fork to lift from the soil to avoid damage. Lift the clump with individual bulbs in a ring. There is no need to split the ring until you wish to use them, but they do dry easier when split. Possible to string like onions but as shallots are smaller may prefer to hang in bunches just removing a bunch when required. To aid drying either place in a string bag or place on slatted shelves in a cool dark place with an air-flow.

## **Growing Shallots for our Annual Show:**

The class for shallots in our show calls for six shallots all the same variety on a plate. Shallot varieties that are popular for show are Hative di Niort and Aristocrat but these varieties are notoriously difficult to find. The exhibition value of points is dependent upon the difficulty of producing a perfect dish. The maximum number of points for a dish of shallots is 18pts; these are divided into the following condition 6pts, uniformity 3pts, size 3pts, shape 3pts, and colour 3pts.

Shallots should be firm, well-ripened shapely bulbs without evidence of dividing, with a thin neck and good size and colour. A well ripened bulb should be free from greening or purpling of the base and roots should be neatly trimmed off at the basal plate.. Necks to be tied or whipped with raffia. Stage on dry sand, heaped at the centre.

Many growers start their shallots in 3/4 inch pots in a good compost(Bloom and Magic) initially for around 2/3 weeks in the greenhouse/poly-tunnel and then moving them into the cold frame. This allows for an early start and avoids the problem of birds lifting the shallots out of the ground. These are then moved to prepared beds.

Assuming the shallots were planted in December then around the beginning of June it is important to keep an eye on the growth to ensure the shallots are making new growth from the centre. When this stops it is the time for harvesting before any secondary growth occurs. Any secondary growth may result in misshapen bulbs and dividing of the bulb.

**Refs:**

[www.rhs.uk/vegetables/shallots/grow-your-own](http://www.rhs.uk/vegetables/shallots/grow-your-own)

[www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/shallots-growing](http://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/shallots-growing)

[www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable-show/growing](http://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable-show/growing)

