

The World is an Onion

Written by Jeff Poppen
Tuesday, July 10, 2012

The world is an onion. We peel off layers and shed tears. Something good for us makes us cry. There's a lot of sadness in the world, but nothing that an onion-filled meal can't make a little better.

At the first dry spell in March, we are planting onions. Six boxes, with 30 bunches in each, filled up a patch that's about 1/3 of an acre. The land was composted and rough plowed with a mold board plow last fall. Rebreaking with a harrow behind it was all it needed this spring.

Onion plants are set about six inches apart in rows on our standard 44 inch centers. I sort the bunches and pull out the tiny ones, who will need to grow in a bed before they are set in the field. The others are laid in the furrow and covered up with soil.

Because of their thin leaves, onions require diligent weeding. They don't shade out competition like a potato or bean plant will. So, before the weeds appear, we hoe out between the plants and keep the middles busted out with the cultivating tractor.

Diversification is the key to a healthy farm. Growing many different kinds of crops and animals follows nature's way and uses different nutrients and elements. It also spreads the workload evenly throughout the year. We weed onions in April before there is much else out in the garden.

The dry, hot weather didn't seem to bother the onions. Wet spells before harvest can cause many to start going bad, but they all looked great yesterday as we pulled up eight truck loads.

A little hay was spread out on the barn loft floor and rows of onions were laid out to dry. I want the green tops to turn brown before storage. We either bag them up in onion sacks, or tie them up in bunches to hang up. Sometimes we take the time to braid them, which looks pretty but is time consuming.

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Onion sets are simply sown in a furrow and covered up with the tractor. They don't need much weeding because they come up thick and are marketed early as green onions. We do thin them sometimes to let the remaining ones make bulbs, but these are also marketed directly. Onion sets don't make as good a storage onion as onion plants, because they are already a year old.

What's for dinner? Potatoes, and onions. Squash, and onions. Beans, and onions. Italian, Mexican, Chinese, or Southern cuisine will all call for onions. So don't cry about it, keep peeling those onions, eat well and stay healthy.