ONIONS.VEGETABLES.IM

Sets or seed

The official garden method and the official commercial method are not the same sentence, and this sheet keeps both.

The Royal Horticultural Society, writing for a British garden, says onions are usually grown from sets — immature bulbs — "the easiest and fastest way to grow them." Encyclopaedia Britannica, describing commercial crops, says most "are grown from the plant's small black seeds."

The official method	Official wording
Sets	The easiest and fastest way, but more prone to bolting. "Using heat-treated sets greatly reduces the risk of bolting." Plant 2cm (¾in) deep, tip just showing, 10–15cm apart, in rows 20–30cm apart. Protect from birds until the sets have rooted.
Seed	Takes more time and care, but "seeds are generally cheaper to buy and you'll have a greater choice of varieties." "Onion seeds don't stay viable for long, with germination rates declining after a year or two." Sow 1.3cm deep. Plants should be growing strongly by late spring, when lengthening days trigger bulb formation.
When they are ready	Autumn-planted overwintering or Japanese sets: June and July, and they store until early winter. Spring-planted or seed-raised onions: July to October, and they can last until well into the following spring.

A short quiz

1. What kind of sets greatly reduce the risk of bolting?
2. How long, officially, do onion seeds stay fully viable?
3. Does Encyclopaedia Britannica say most commercial onions are grown from sets?

Answers. Heat-treated sets. They don't stay viable for long, with germination rates declining after a year or two. No — official wording says most are grown from the plant's small black seeds.

Wording from the Royal Horticultural Society, "How to grow onions," and Encyclopaedia Britannica, "onion," re-checked 18 November 2026. onions.vegetables.im is independent of both. Typographic sheet: no photographs inside.