Onions

Allium cepa

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Background

- **ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION**

Onions are believed to have evolved in the arid regions of Western Asia. From this region with its specific climate, onions have spread to many parts of the world with widely differing climates. In South Africa, onions are grown commercially in any province. The major producing areas are Western Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga. There are two groups of cultivars available in South Africa namely short-day and intermediate-day cultivars. Examples of these cultivars are Granex types, Hojem, Pyramid, Texas Grano, Caledon Globe and Radium.

- **SOIL AND CLIMATIC REQUIREMENTS**

The best results can be obtained on loamy soils which are deep and well drained to a depth of 120 cm, with a pH between 5,5 and 6,5. Onions grow best in temperatures ranging from 18 °C to 22 °C. Higher temperatures (25–27 °C) will promote bulb formation, while lower temperatures (8–13 °C) will induce flowering.

- **USES**

Mature and immature onions are used to flavour food. They are used in salads and pickles. They are sometimes used as repellent for insects attacking other vegetables.

Cultural practices

- **PLANTING**

Onions can be sown directly or seedlings can be transplanted. After transplanting, keep the soil moist for the first 5 days to overcome transplanting shock. Plant onions 7–10 cm apart in rows that are 20–25 cm apart.

- **FERTILISATION**

During soil preparation, work in 100 g of 2:3:2 (22) or 2:3:4 (30) per 1 m^2. Use 10 g LAN per 1 m^2 as well as 10 g KCl per 1 m^2 3 weeks after transplanting and again 6 weeks after planting.

- **IRRIGATION**

Onions require approximately 400 to 600 mm of water during the growing season. Do not irrigate onions for 3 weeks before harvesting.

- **WEED CONTROL**

Weeds are pulled out by hands. Mechanical weed control can also be used. Use only registered herbicides.

- **PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL**

Thrips are very small insects which feed on leaves by sucking plant sap. Registered chemicals, good cultural practices (such as proper crop rotation) as well as field sanitation are the three mechanisms that should be integrated to control all the pests and diseases affecting the crop. Proper sanitation should include the removal and destroying of all the diseased plant material.

Disclaimer

Acknowledgement

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