

Root veggies hardy but still need TLC

Through the ages and in all lands, onions, radishes and beets have been vegetable favorites. In Egypt, onions fed the sweating builders of the pyramids and the conquering troops of Alexander the Great. Dikon radishes are used in Oriental dishes, such as Japanese sashimi.

And, while the Mediterranean was the original home of the beet, where it grew as a leafy plant without enlarged roots, the large-rooted beet is first noted in literature in Germany around 1550.

True to their hardy and diverse heritage, onions, radishes and beets can be planted in a range of weather and soil conditions. Although beets grow best in cool weather, they tolerate warmer climates. Beets should be planted early, with additional plantings to follow later in the growing season. Hot midsummer planting requires special efforts at watering and mulching in order to get a good base for beet seedlings.

A common problem with growing beets is overplanting. Lack of moisture, which can be caused by drought or competition with other beets or weeds, results in stringy and tough beets, and it is important that seedlings be thinned.

Radishes also require careful watering and fertilizing. Although rad-

ishes are easy enough to plant and grow quickly in great volume, it is vital that they be watered properly and thinned soon after they emerge to achieve crisp and mild radishes.

There are two varieties of radishes — defined by when they are grown. Spring radishes can be grown throughout the season in cooler areas and in all but the hottest months in warmer areas. Winter radishes, slower growing, much larger and more durable than spring radishes, should be planted in the fall. They tend to flower before sizeable roots develop if planted in the spring, while the cooler temperatures and shorter days of fall discourage flowering.

Unlike beets and radishes, it is easier and more reliable to start onions from sets — small dry onions available in later winter and early spring — rather than seed. The type of onions grown should be selected with care because of the delicate growth timing: They grow tops in cool weather and form bulbs in warm weather. The timing of bulbing is controlled by both temperature and day length.

Onion varieties are divided into "short-day" and "long-day," and it is important to use the varieties designated for specific areas.



The most common problem in growing healthy onions is maggot infestation.

Short-day varieties are planted in the southern parts of the United States as a winter crop begun in the fall. They make bulbs as days lengthen to 12 hours in early summer.

Long-day onions are grown in the northern latitudes and most require 14 to 16 hours of daylight to form bulbs. They are planted in the spring and bulb during the longest days of summer.

Onions are harvested by pulling from the ground when half of the tops have broken over naturally. The tops should be cut off 1½ inches above the bulb when they have fully wilted.

The most common problem in growing beets, radishes and onions

are maggots which feed upon the bulb below the ground. Onion and radish maggots are the larvae of flies that appear in spring and lay eggs on the soil near the base of all these vegetables.

It is important to prevent the damage at seeding time, because that is when the flies are most active. Products like Ortho's Vegetable Guard Soil Insect Killer contain Diazinon which, if sprinkled lightly in the seed furrow at planting or seeding time, will prevent the flies from laying their eggs.

Telltale signs of maggot infestation are roots honeycombed with silmy channels and scarred by brown grooves.

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