

Onions in the Northland

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Checkerberry Farm is a diversified, certified organic operation located in Maine's central highlands. The soils are very stoney, clay silt loam, all on south and south west slopes. We typically enjoy 100 frost free days on the cusp of zones 3 and 4.

We produce onion seedlings for our own field production and for other growers as well.

Onions are seeded in open flats or cell trays mid-February through March in our production greenhouse. When bench space is needed the trays are moved into high tunnels as cold or even freezing does not harm them. They are moved out of the high tunnels beginning in May.

As soon as the ground can be worked, usually mid-May, the onions are transplanted into rich and fertile well-drained soil into 36 inch rows. Depending on type, they are planted singularly 8 inches apart for large Spanish types or in clusters of 2 to 4 for storage varieties.

Keeping onions well weeded with shallow cultivation is a must. We blind cultivate with a tine weeder to start, then switch to sweeps and side knives. If Mother Nature conspires against us and the weeds get ahead of us, we have a Reigie pto powered cultivator to clean it up.

Scouting for thrips and other potential threats is advised. Entrust works well on thrips, our only insect problem to date.

Once the plants start to finish, skins develop and tops fall over. They are then pulled and are placed in a windrow. A week or two later on a dry day, the onions are collected and run over a topping table which deposits them into bins. The bins are stored in a storage room at low humidity and low temperature.

Onions are bagged as orders com in.