

Which Onion Variety is Best for Me?

The size of the onion bulb depends upon the number and size of green leaves, or tops. From each leaf a ring of onion develops; the larger the leaf, the larger the ring. The perfect onion has 13 rings.

The onion first forms a top and then, depending on the onion variety and length of daylight, starts to form the bulb from the lengthening leaf base. Onions are divided into three categories: long-day, intermediate-day, and short-day. Long-day onion varieties stop forming tops and begin to form bulbs when day length reaches 14 to 16 hours. Intermediate-day, or mid-day onion plants start making bulbs with 12 to 14 hours of daylight, while short-day onions start making bulbs much earlier in the year, when there are only 10 to 12 hours of daylight.

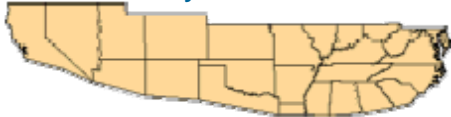
The day length of any place in the United States is determined by latitude and time of year. At the equator the day length is almost always 12 hours. As the latitude increases toward the North Pole, the summer days become longer.

Cool weather at the start of the growing season encourages heavy leaf growth, and this helps produce larger bulbs. Leaf growth should start as early as possible in the winter (**short-day**) or spring (**long-day**).

Long-day onions generally do better in northern states (north of the 37th parallel),



Intermediate-day onions do better in the middle section of the country (35th to 37th parallel)



Short-day plants do better in the south (south of the 35th parallel).



Actually, onions are sensitive to the dark period of the night rather than to the length of the day. Bulbing is not determined by day length alone but also by the interaction of day length, temperature, and light intensity. The rate of bulbing is more rapid with high light intensity and increased temperature. The optimum temperature for rapid bulb development is between 75 and 85 deg. F; bulb growth is poor below 50 deg. F and above 87 deg. F.