

## Onions

Harvesting and curing of onions for long keeping should be completed as soon as possible, as the weather after April becomes progressively less favourable for drying bulbs and proper drying and curing are essential for long keeping. Only sound, well-formed bulbs which have been properly cured should go into long storage; others should be put aside for immediate use. Small quantities can be strung or stored in open mesh bags in a cool ventilated shed or cellar, but because of the injury which often results when there is a heavy weight of onions in a bag, it is advisable when storing considerable quantities of onions to use specially made slatted storage crates or to store them on slatted shelves.

Onions should not be exposed to direct sunlight during storage, as it may promote early growth; nor should they be exposed to excessively moist conditions, as it may encourage the development of roots, which are exhausting to the bulbs. If it is necessary to store them outside, a dry, sunless position, where there is good air draught is desirable. In favourable sunny situations the onions can be hung on a frame as illustrated in last month's notes, but they should be covered against rain, and air should circulate freely around them.

When onion plants ripen properly the leaves weaken in the neck or region just above the bulb and the top falls over and the leaves remain green. If the top dries from the tips toward the base while the plant stands erect, the neck is not closed and the bulbs may not keep well in storage.

Unfortunately onions in a crop rarely mature uniformly and the best time to begin to harvest them is when about 20 to 25 per cent. of the tops have broken over. If onions are completely ripe when they are harvested they tend to root rather easily if left lying on moist ground and this sort of growth is difficult to check and usually makes them unfit for anything but immediate use. If onions are pulled when they are slightly immature, they tend to retain their outer skins better and are less likely to sprout and root than if they are cured in the field.

Immature onions are, however, often less solid than fully mature onions and the stage at which onions are harvested must usually be largely governed by climatic conditions, drying and storage facilities, and whether they are for long keeping or more immediate use.

Not all onion varieties are suitable for storing. In New Zealand the most generally preferred variety is Pukekohe Long Keeper.

### Autumn-sown Onions

Though autumn sowing of main crop onions is a fairly general practice in

## HOME GARDEN IN APRIL



Autumn is a good time to build a compost heap, as crop residues are usually plentiful then.

the North Island, it is rarely done in southern districts. In most districts late March or early April is considered the best time for autumn sowing. In southern districts the onions are not usually thinned, but are kept cultivated and grown on until about November or December, when they are used as "thick necks" without being encouraged to form large bulbs. In most northern districts, however, the plants are lifted in early spring and set out in rows 12in. to 15in. apart, with the plants 4in. to 6in. apart in the rows.

Autumn sowing in some districts is rather risky, and where winters are severe success depends to some extent on the season. Early frost will sometimes "lift" and damage late-sown crops, whereas if the seed is sown too early or if a long period of mild weather precedes a very severe cold period, the plants sometimes run to seed before they have developed adequately.

Though this is true of autumn sowing in general, in the north, where winters are less severe and mildew is more troublesome on the later crops,

the risks are much less and autumn sowing and transplanting of the main crop in July or August are quite common. For autumn sowing the ground should be deeply cultivated and broken down to a fine tilth. It should be gently firmed, but care should be taken where the soil is heavy to avoid firming it too much, as the heavier soils tend to consolidate excessively where they are subjected to frequent winter rains.

If well-rotted stable or farmyard manure is available, it should be incorporated some time before the final preparation of the soil is begun. Best use can be made of such manure by adding it to land on which the crop is to mature. If keeping quality onions are required, it is not advisable to apply excessive quantities of organic manure in spring, as the bulbs may be stimulated into excessive leaf growth and weed growth is likely to be more troublesome.

Few home gardeners are likely to have much farmyard manure, and available organic matter such as compost plus a complete fertiliser applied at the rate of about 3oz. to 6oz. per