
Tropical Onion Seed Germination

Tropical onion seed germination was poor, according to the seed trial reports many of you returned to us. Onion seeds are short-lived, so we were not surprised to see some reports of low germination in the field. However, the onion seeds in our seedbank were continuously tested for acceptable germination, and at ECHO we successfully grew many of the onion varieties for evaluation.

Based on your results, we asked the researchers who supplied ECHO with the onion trials to send us fresh seed (see EDN 39-1 and 41-6). This comment from their letter may explain why some people enjoyed great onion harvests while others had no germination: "Please note that the onion seed sent to you is packaged very dry, so the packets should be opened and the seed allowed to take in moisture from the atmosphere overnight before the seed is sown. You risk damaging the seed by imbibition [water uptake] injury if it is sown straight from the packet into damp ground. Another approach is to sow the seed into dry ground, then water it the following day. This also allows it to equilibrate naturally before it gets wet. Seed not wanted for use at once should be resealed in the foil packet immediately after removal of the amount you need, not allowed to remain open to the air for long."

It is generally good to let well-dried seeds sealed in airtight packets absorb some moisture from the air before planting them directly in wet soil. Other seeds harvested at ECHO for our seedbank are dried thoroughly, but not so much that such imbibition injury is likely.

If you had poor results with the onion trials, write ECHO for more seed and let us know your results using this method. Your seed trial reports are very important to us in identifying problems such as this, as well as learning of successful introductions of the crops in our seedbank. If you are new to ECHO's network and you would like more information about tropical onions with your seeds, see the ECHO Technical Note, "Onions in the Tropics and Subtropics (http://members.echocommunity.org/resource/collection/12164DCB-6FCC-42E5-899A-DBA41B1A9B19/Onions_in_the_Tropics_&_Subtropics.pdf)."

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