



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Potato Onion!

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The lowly onion is an ancient plant, cultivated since at least 5,000 BC. Today it is the primary vegetable ingredient in the cuisine of many countries. The potato onion (also known as "multiplier onion") is an old, but nearly forgotten member of the onion family. Traditional onions are much more uniform in their growth habit, and are therefore easier to harvest, so farmers favor traditional onions. Potato onions have settled into the category of "pass-along" plants, plants that people give to friends, who, in turn, give it to more friends.

Traditional onions produce just one onion bulb per plant, but potato onions bear onions in clusters, kind of like potatoes. Potato onions are often first planted in spring, and harvested in fall. During that period they increase, on average, fivefold. When they are harvested in autumn, the best bulbs are saved for planting the following spring, and the rest are eaten. If you follow that regimen you will have potato onions forever. If left untouched in the ground over winter, they will split into multiple bulbs by spring. Mature potato onions vary in size due to soil, fertilizer, moisture, etc, but they range in size, up to 2" in diameter. Some folks believe removal of the flowers will increase the size of the onions at harvest time---I think that is probably true in most years, but you'll have to decide if you want to chop off the attractive flowers.



Potato onions are easy to grow, requiring no special conditions. Like most anything in the onion family that I have come across, they like as much sun as possible. Most any soil is good, but they don't like excessive moisture, so any soil that retains water would not be good. The potato onion is a hardy perennial, but I think it would be wise to apply protective mulch after the

ground freezes around Thanksgiving time. A severely cold winter, or worse yet, one with a lot of freezing and thawing, could be damaging.

I have grown several different kinds of potato onions. They were all unnamed "pass-along" plants, coming from several sources. They range in height from 12-36", and the onion stalks vary in thickness. The tallest ones bloom earliest, with the short ones about two weeks behind. At Milaeger's we have red, white, and yellow potato onions.

Potato onions are more pungent than most onions, so they are usually used for cooking, rather than eating raw. A hotter, drier year will produce a smaller, hotter onion. But don't think that you can make them mild by adding copious amounts of water---too much water and they will rot. Follow the easy directions and soon you'll be passing them along to your friends, too.

Potato Onions are available in limited quantities at our Racine Store only.