

ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest. Email or mail your questions to:

info@sprigsandtwigs.net or

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Question #1 this Week: *I bought some yellow onions and brought them home a few weeks ago. I just noticed that they have sprouted. Can I still eat them or can I plant them and re-grow onions? Megan*

Linda's Answer: Judging from the picture you sent, your onions may be too far gone to eat the bulb part. If the shoots and roots are small, you can cut them off and still use the onion if it is firm and shows no evidence of rot. If the onion is otherwise firm but has a little mold, you can cut the mold off and use the onion. If the onion is squishy, throw it out or compost it, but be sure to save the shoots. In your case, the shoots are well established and you can eat that part or use it in cooking just like you would scallions or green onions. The shoots are rich in Vitamins A, C and E and will taste like onions but will be a bit sweeter. They will be delicious!

The second part of your question about planting and re-growing onions gets a yes and a no answer. Onions are what is called a biennial plant - they have a two year life span. The first year, they start from seed, grow into a plant and then become a bulb that becomes dormant over the winter. In their second year, the bulb starts growing again but will produce flowers, which when fertilized, produce seeds that can be used to start the process all over again. When we harvest onion bulbs in their first year, we are interrupting the two year cycle and while they can be replanted, they will only produce flowers and then seeds. You can, of course, harvest the greens which are called scallions or green onions, before they turn into a flower head and use them in cooking and salads. If you let it go to seed, collect the seeds and plant them the following year. To collect the seeds after the seed head has dried out, use a paper bag over the seed head and shake the seed head in the bag. Since the onion originally came from the supermarket, there is no telling where it was grown and you may not be able to regrow bulb onions from seed in your area. You should be able to produce a crop of delicious scallions. Have fun and give it a try!



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Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

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