

Today's lesson on onions and garlic covered what makes an onion and garlic unique. These Amaryllidaceae vegetables store their plant food in the form of carbohydrates, the product of photosynthesis, in the stem of the vegetable in a structure called a bulb. These vegetables are different from vegetables that have food storage as part of their root systems (generally called root crops). We also learned that we don't wait for the onion to complete their life cycle because we grow the onion for its bulb. As a result we don't observe the onion producing flowers or making seed. But in fact the onion does produce seed which is responsible for its reproduction and not for the purpose of producing a bulb. Often growers refer to the value of the bulb as a food source for the vegetables' dormant periods during its life cycle. Can you think of a purpose of the bulb (or is nature just having fun)? How about allowing the onion to survive inhospitable events such as severe cold or dry spells? If you think about it, I bet you can come up with more reasons for producing a bulb!

We also directed our attention to value of efficient garden use by growing vegetables in a nursery setting for a number of months before planting them in the garden. With the correct garden planning, one crop can be started in conditions that favor a vegetable's early growth in a different setting while other plants in the garden are still producing. We do this often while gardening and often for different reasons, take for instance starting tomatoes in late January or February so that the tomato seedlings will be ready to plant in the garden in March when weather conditions are good for the tomato to grow and bear fruit. As you may know it can get too hot for tomatoes to set fruit in our summer and it would take too long if we planted the tomato seeds directly in the garden for them to reach maturity and bear much fruit. But by planting transplants, the early growth period is done in a nursery setting favorable to the tomatoes' growth when it is too cold outside. Transplanting the tomato when conditions are right provides the optimum amount of time for the tomato to mature and produce multiple harvestings of tomatoes.

This week we produced a lot of "green" matter for our compost bins by breaking up unused pumpkins and adding them to the compost minus their seeds. We added over 40 pumpkins to both our Main garden compost bins and as well as to our Orchard's compost bins. So this Thursday was a very productive effort in the gardens. We planted over 300 onion sets in the Annex, added pumpkin "green" matter to our compost bins, as well as harvesting sugar snap peas, beets, collards, carrots, lettuce, and eggplant. In the first half of the semester we have harvested over ½ ton of vegetables, wow, I mean wow!

The holidays are just around the corner, we are wishing everyone a very Happy Holiday and we are looking forward to working together in the new year.

See you next year!