

The Zone 6b Onion Hall of Fame

...and Where to Get These Celebrity Bulbs-in-the-Making

Not all onions are created equal. Some grow huge, some store forever, some are sweet enough to eat like apples (no judgment), and some will make you cry—but only because they taste so good. Here are the top varieties that thrive in our high-country Zone 6b gardens.

Most long-day onions are suited for Zone 6b — the ones that bulb under long summer daylight — are **ONLY available as seeds** or occasionally as purchased *plants* (seedlings). Sets are typically short-day or generic mixed types and **not ideal for large, high-quality bulbs** in our climate.

These are the superstar onions and shallots that ROCK our high-country gardens. Long-day, cold-tolerant, flavorful, beautiful, and proven by gardeners like us. Let the bulb-worship begin.

1. PATTERSON (Storage All-Star) - seed only



Start from seed: November–January for biggest bulbs.

Notes: Rarely, if ever, sold as sets. Designed to be grown from seed for long storage.

Why it's legendary:

- The *gold standard* for storage onions (8–10+ months!)
- Perfectly round, firm, golden bulbs
- Disease-resistant and reliable in fluctuating spring temps

Best for: Winter pantry storage, large harvests, and gardeners who love consistency.

Buy it here:

- Johnny's Selected Seeds → <https://www.johnnyseeds.com>
- High Mowing Organic Seeds → <https://www.highmowingseeds.com>
- Territorial Seed Co. → <https://territorialseed.com>

2. AILSA CRAIG (The Sweet Giant) - seed only



Start from seed: November–January (especially if you want the giant size).

Notes: Never sold as sets. Must be grown from seed due to heirloom type and growth habit.

Why gardeners love it:

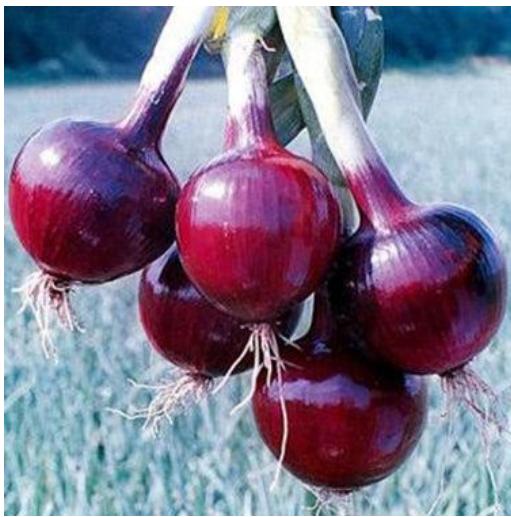
- Enormous, softball-sized onions
- Mild, sweet flavor—dreamy for salads and caramelizing
- A showstopper on any harvest table

Best for: Fresh summer eating (not long-term storage).

Buy it here:

- Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds → <https://www.rareseeds.com>
- Johnny's Selected Seeds → <https://www.johnnyseeds.com>
- Seeds 'n Such → <https://www.seedsnsuch.com>

3. RED WING (The Best Storage Red) - seed only



Start from seed: December–January.

Notes: Long-day reds are almost never available as sets; they don't perform well that way. Seed only.

Why it's amazing:

- Beautiful deep-red skins
- Surprisingly long storage (rare for reds!)
- Crisp texture and vibrant color in salads & salsas

Best for: Gardeners who cook with a *lot* of red onion.

Buy it here:

- Territorial Seed Co. → <https://territorialseed.com>
- Johnny's Selected Seeds → <https://www.johnnyseeds.com>
- Harris Seeds → <https://www.harrisseeds.com>

4. YELLOW SWEET SPANISH (Classic Kitchen Workhorse) - seeds or sets



SEED start: *January* for large bulbs.

SETS: Sometimes available in stores, but...

Note: Sets will produce smaller, stronger-flavored bulbs than starting from seed. If you want sweet, go with seed.

Why it's a winner:

- Sweet, golden, large bulbs
- Reliable even in tough soils
- Excellent for everyday cooking

Best for: Soups, stews, roasting, caramelizing—THE versatile onion.

Buy it here:

- Botanical Interests → <https://www.botanicalinterests.com>
- Baker Creek → <https://www.rareseeds.com>
- Ferry-Morse (widely available) → <https://ferrymorse.com>

5. CANDY ONION (Intermediate-Day Sweetie from Gurney's) - seeds or plants (not sets)



SEED start: *December–January*.

PLANTS: Sold as bare-root bundles (very popular and reliable).

NOT typically sold as sets — intermediate-day varieties don't perform well when dried into sets.

Why it earned a place in the Hall of Fame:

- Sweet, mild flavor—but with more body than Vidalias
- Bulbs size up reliably even in higher elevation areas
- Quicker to mature (85–100 days)
- Loved by local growers for consistent results

Best for: Gardeners wanting big, sweet onions without super early seed-starting demands.

Buy it here:

- Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co. → <https://www.gurneys.com>
- True Leaf Market → <https://trueleafmarket.com/products/onion-candy-hybrid-seeds>
- Reimer Seeds → <https://www.reimerseeds.com>

6. ZEBRUNE SHALLOT (Banana Shallot Elegance) - seed only



Start from seed: *November–January* for largest clusters.

Notes: Unlike classic shallots, Zebrune is a *seed-grown shallot* and must be started early for best results.

Why it's fancy:

- Mild, gourmet flavor
- Produces generous clusters
- Excellent for roasting, sauces, and French cooking
- Stores beautifully

Best for: Anyone wanting to grow something special beyond standard onions.

Buy it here:

- Baker Creek → <https://www.rareseeds.com>
- High Mowing Seeds → <https://www.highmowingseeds.com>
- Pinetree Garden Seeds → <https://www.superseeds.com>

7. BONUS PICK: RED ZEPPELIN - seeds or plants (rarely sets)



SEED start: January.

PLANTS: Often available as bare-root transplants.

SETS: Very uncommon—most red onion sets are generic short-day types unsuitable for Zone 6b.

Why it soars:

- Big, rosy-red bulbs
- Juicy flavor and great crunch
- Better storage than many red varieties

Best for: Gardeners wanting both beauty *and* storage power.

Buy it here:

- Seeds 'n Such → <https://www.seedsnsuch.com>
- Jung Seed → <https://www.jungseed.com>
- Territorial Seed Co. → <https://territorialseed.com>

Quick Summary Chart

Onion Variety	Seed	Sets	Plants (bare-root)	Best Start Time for Zone 6b
Patterson	✓ Yes	✗ No	Occasionally	Nov–Jan
Ailsa Craig	✓ Yes	✗ No	Rare	Nov–Jan
Red Wing	✓ Yes	✗ No	Rare	Dec–Jan
Yellow Sweet Spanish	✓ Yes	✓ Yes (but smaller bulbs)	Sometimes	Jan
Candy Onion	✓ Yes	✗ No	✓ Very common	Dec–Jan
Zebrune Shallot	✓ Yes	✗ No	Rare	Nov–Jan
Red Zeppelin	✓ Yes	✗ Rare	✓ Common	Jan

Why most long-day onions **MUST** be grown from seed in Zone 6b

- Sets are grown by forcing onions to bulb prematurely, then drying them.
- This process works well for short-day onions (southern varieties).
- Long-day onions (what we grow) **bolt easily** when grown as sets.
- Seed-grown plants are stronger, more uniform, and produce larger bulbs.

So for **biggest, best-quality onions** → **choose seed**.

If you want convenience → choose purchased *plants* (not sets).

Seed Sources Directory (Clickable)

Here's a clean list you can include at the bottom of your blog:

- Johnny's Selected Seeds — <https://www.johnnyseeds.com>
- Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds — <https://www.rareseeds.com>
- Territorial Seed Company — <https://territorialseed.com>
- High Mowing Organic Seeds — <https://www.highmowingseeds.com>
- Gurney's — <https://www.gurneys.com>
- Seeds 'n Such — <https://www.seedsnsuch.com>
- Harris Seeds — <https://www.harrisseeds.com>
- Jung Seed — <https://www.jungseed.com>
- Reimer Seeds — <https://www.reimerseeds.com>
- Botanical Interests — <https://www.botanicalinterests.com>
- True Leaf Markets — <https://trueleafmarket.com>