



Know Your Onions, and How To Use Them

Alliums (onions, garlic, leeks, scallions, ramps) are a staple in every home cook's kitchen. Whether they're tucked into a quiche or caramelized and folded into mac and cheese, different types of onions can add immense flavor to any dish. Choosing the right one for whatever you're cooking will help you achieve the best (and most delicious) results. Here's a simple guide to understanding what each type of onion has to offer.

Yellow Onions



Good for all recipes, especially caramelizing.

If a recipe doesn't specify what type of onion to use, your safest bet is a yellow onion, as yellow onions are your standard cooking onion unless you have some other reason to reach for something else. The yellows hold up extremely well over that process of caramelizing because it is a long, slow heat.



Sweet Onions



Good for salads, relishes, garnishes.

Popular sweet onions include Vedalias, Walla Wallas and Maui. These well-known varieties have a pale-yellow skin. The inside may look white but they are yellow. If you're looking for an onion that tastes amazing raw in salads, relishes or chopped as a garnish, go for sweet onions. They just have that mild onion flavor with a touch of sweetness that you can use in a number of things.

Red Onions



Good for salads, grilling and pickling.

Red onions are ubiquitous on salads, sandwiches and other raw preparations partly because of their appealing deep-purple color. Red onions, specifically, can have a really peppery, spicy flavor to them. This variety is sweetest from March to September. Red onions pair well with equally strong-flavored greens such as kale or arugula. Reddin also recommends red onions for roasting, grilling and pickling.



White Onions



Good for Mexican dishes and grilling.

White onions are the type of onion you'll usually find in prepared salads (potato and macaroni salads, for instance) and traditionally in Mexican cuisine. White onions can be strong but they tend to have less aftertaste. Their slightly sweet taste adds to fresh salsas, guacamole, ceviche and tacos. They're also commonly served up in barbecue establishments with a plate of meat, pickle and sides.

Shallots



Good for sauces and dressings.

Shallots have a mild onion flavor. These bulb-shaped alliums taste like a garlic-onion hybrid. In French cooking, shallots are used in vinaigrettes and sauces, as well as on top of steak. When a recipe calls for a shallot and you don't have one, you can likely substitute another type of onion for it.

Scallions



Good for: Asian and Mexican cooking and garnishes

These two-tone onions can be eaten cooked or raw. Scallions are popular in Chinese and Mexican cuisine. In Chinese cooking, scallions are used in stir-fries, soups, stews and braised dishes. Scallions or green onions have a milder flavor than regular onions. Use your scallions up in one of these scallion recipes.



How to Purchase and Store Onions



Purchase firm onions that are free of blemishes. The papery orbs shouldn't have a scent. Onions should be stored in a cool, dark place with plenty of ventilation, according to the National Onion Association. Avoid storing whole unpeeled onions in the refrigerator.

Tame the Flavor



To tame the pungent flavor of raw onion, Reddin recommends slicing very thinly—ideally using a mandolin. Or you can soak onion slices in cold water for as long as overnight to tone down their potency. Next, read up on all the onion recipes you'll ever need.