

Chives



QUICK FACTS

Culinary Types:

Allium schoenoprasum (common chives, onion chives)

Allium ledebourianum (giant Siberian chives)

Allium tuberosum (garlic chives, Chinese chives)

Allium nutans (Siberian garlic chives)



Chives are bulbous hardy perennial plants of the genus *Allium* in the *Liliaceae*, or Lily family, grown for their onion or garlic flavored leaves and for their pretty and edible flower heads, rather than for their bulbs as with most other *Alliums*. They are very easy to grow. The chives have thickened underground stems that may be semi-bulbous, with linear leaves growing straight up from the bulbs. The leaves of all the chive-like plants are linear, but those of common chives and giant Siberian chives are tubular, while those of garlic chives and Siberian garlic chives are flattened. Common or onion chives bears abundant rosy-lavender flower heads (rarely, white) resembling red clover in late May and June; garlic chives bears pretty white flower heads in flattened umbels in August/September.

Varieties: "Giant" or "Siberian" chives have been identified as *A. ledebourianum* although some experts think they are simply a larger form of *A. schoenoprasum*. It is a larger plant than the common chives, has a more blue-green foliage and, to some, a richer taste. Siberian garlic chives, from western and central Siberia, is edible and highly ornamental, with 2-inch rounded umbels of rosy-violet flowers; it is sometimes sold as a perennial for the sunny flower border. It is taller than garlic chives. Its common name may be more for its flattened leaves than its taste, which is not especially garlicky.

Culture

Chives grown from seed takes two years to become a plant of small size, so it is best to start with a division from another gardener or a purchased plant. The clump will increase annually by bulb division, and will need to be divided every 3 years to keep the plants vigorous, by cutting straight

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down through the clump to divide it into several pieces, each with a clump of bulbs and roots. Chives will grow in any well-drained soil in full sun. Mulching will prevent invasion of the clumps by grass. As with other onions, chives will benefit from a side dressing of organic fertilizer. All the chives should be deadheaded, that is the spent flowers should be cut off before seeds are formed. This is especially necessary with garlic chives, or their very fertile seeds will self-sow aggressively.

Uses

The linear leaves are snipped and used primarily fresh, stirred into uncooked foods, such as soft cheeses or salads; or added to cooked foods during the last few minutes of cooking, or as a garnish. Overheating will destroy the flavor. Garlic chive flowers are edible in the bud stage or freshly opened (try in stirfry). The opened flowers are attractive cut flowers with a sweet aroma; flowers of both types dry well for winter bouquets. Snipped chive leaves should be used to flavor butter or oil, which must be frozen if kept more than a week or so (in the refrigerator); or seal in plastic bags and freeze. It is not worthwhile to dry chives.



Sources

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