

Home Gardening Series

Chives

Craig R. Andersen
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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – loam
Fertility – medium
pH – 5.8 to 7.0
Temperature – cool
Moisture – moist

Culture

Planting – divide or direct seed
Spacing – 15 x 24 inches
Hardiness – hardy
Fertilizer – medium

Chives – *Allium shoenoprasum* – perennial

Since chives grow wild in Italy and Greece, it is certain that the species was known by the ancient Romans and Greeks.

Chives are perennial plants that belong to the onion family. They are grown throughout most of North America. The small, bulbous plants grow in clumps 8 to 12 inches high. Their attractive, violet-colored flowers appear in May.

Cultural Practices

The plants are usually propagated by dividing the clumps, keeping 4 to 6 bulblets per clump. They are planted in the same manner as onion transplants. Divide the clumps in the fall or early spring. It is necessary to divide clumps every year to prevent overcrowding. Chives may also be started with seeds planted in the early spring.

The tender leaves or the entire plant may be harvested whenever desired during the season. The bulbs are not used. Some gardeners dry the leaves; others chop them up fresh and keep them in the freezer for winter use. Many gardeners dig a clump of chives in late January, place them in a pot and bring them in the house for fresh use during the winter.



Chinese chives resemble common chives in clump-growth habit but have flat, powdery gray leaves and white flowers. The leaf portion of Chinese chives is prized as a fresh product.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. What are chives?**
A. Chives are a hardy relative of the onion. They produce numerous thin, hollow leaves 6 to 10 inches long. In late spring or early summer, they bloom with lavender blossoms. Chives are classed as perennials, but they are not evergreen perennials.

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Cultivars

Crop	Variety	Days to Maturity	Seed/ 100 Ft of Row	Sources (see "Sources" paragraph below)	Remarks
Chives	Common Chives	80	1/4 oz	5, 8, 12, 16, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35	Grass-like herb with mild onion flavor. Excellent to grow indoors over winter.
	Garlic Chives	80	1/4 oz	5, 8, 12, 16, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31	Broader leaved than common chive, mild flavor between garlic and onion. Also known as Chinese leeks.
	Curly Chives	55	1/4 oz	7	Large, pink flowers; flat, curled and twisted leaves. Great for the rock garden.

Q. Do chives require any special care for maximum production?

- A. Constant harvesting of the leaves is essential to keep a healthy, vigorous plant. Every year, dig and divide the clumps and plant them in another part of the garden. They are easily grown in gardens and do exceptionally well in pots or in other containers.

Q. When planting chives, do I use seeds or plants?

- A. Either. If you plant clumps or plants, you can start harvesting within 2 months. Starting from seed takes about 90 days before first harvest.

Sources

For a list of sources referred to by number, request FSA6106, *Seed Sources: Vegetable and Herb*, for current address, telephone and web site.

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