

The Herbalist

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Chive (*Allium schoenoprasum*) and Garlic chive (*A. tuberosum*) Family Liliaceae

Chive is the smallest member of the *Allium* family, which also includes garlic, leek, and shallot. This hardy perennial has small bulbs ("stools" to botanists) that grow together in dense clusters and send up hollow green spears. Round purple flower heads comprised of many individual blossoms appear in May. Garlic chive also grows from small bulbs but it has leaves that are flattened blades. It blooms in the heat of summer with fragrant, rounded white flower heads. Chive has a mild onion flavor while garlic chive has a slight garlic taste.

Chives are one of the easiest herbs to grow. They may be grown from seed sown directly to the garden as soon as the soil can be worked. Sow seeds in good soil and lightly cover them with compost or fine soil. Chives may also be purchased already started as young clumps. Once transplanted these should be mulched to retain water and discourage competing weeds.

Chives will live for many years if treated properly. If they are cut often, a fish emulsion fertilizer will allow the chives to replace nutrients. Cut the side shoots to the base and leave the remainder of the plant. If chives are allowed to bloom and develop their black seeds they will prolifically resow in the garden.

Chives do not dry well but it is a simple task to bring a pot or two in for winter. Transplant a cluster into a 5-inch pot in early September and sink the pot to its rim in the garden. After the first killing frost, put the pot into a coldframe for 90 days.

Chives need this rest period in order to resprout. Then bring the pot into the house, water, and place it in a sunny window. Alternately, chives may be frozen in small packets for winter use. They are wonderful added to salads, tomatoes soups, potatoes and sausage dishes.

Chives are native to the Orient and have been used in culinary dishes for 5000 years. Although medicinal uses were not extensive, they were used in fortune telling and were thought to drive away disease and evil.

