

# Chive Rings Profile

## Also known as

Allium schoenoprasum.

## Introduction

If you're a vegan and you don't make chicken soup, what do you take for a cold? The answer from Traditional Chinese Medicine is to make a soup with tofu or miso and chives. The chive is the smallest of the onion family and is native to Asia and Europe, and has been used both medicinally and as a culinary ingredient for 5000 years, but not actively cultivated until the middle ages. In 190 AD, the venerable master Zhang Zhong Zhing, whose Treatise on Cold is still the basic text of herbal taught to doctors in China today, recommended chives and soy to "open the pores" of the skin, inducing sweating, to sweat out the "environmental evil" he associated with cold and we associate with viruses.

## Constituents

Alanine (antioxidant, cancer preventative), allyl-mercaptan, beta-carotene, caffeic acid, citric acid, ferulic acid, glutamic acid, glycine, histidine, Isoleucine, kaempferol, malic acid, methionine, niacin, octacosanol, quercetin, thiamine, vitamin C.

## Parts Used

The fresh or dried stem, chopped.

## Typical Preparations

Can be used to make teas, but more often used in cooking.

## Summary

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, chives warm the kidney and increase the yang. Chives are used to maintain male potency, and a study published in the November 2002 Journal of the National Cancer Institute (of the United States) found that men who consumed the greatest amounts of chives had a 70% lower risk of developing cancer of the prostate.

## Precautions

None.

**Botanical: *Allium schoenoprasum* (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Liliaceae**

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**---Synonyms---**Cives.

(*French*) Ail civitte

(*Old French*) Petit poureau

**---Part Used---**Herb.

**---Habitat---**The Chive is the smallest, though one of the finest-flavoured of the Onion tribe, belonging to the botanical group of plants that goes under the name of *Allium*, which includes also the Garlic, Leek and Shallot. Though said to be a native of Britain, it is only very rarely found growing in an uncultivated state, and then only in the northern and western counties of England and Wales and in Oxfordshire. It grows in rocky pastures throughout temperate and northern Europe. De Candolle says: 'This species occupies an extensive area in the northern hemisphere. It is found all over Europe from Corsica and Greece to the south of Sweden, in Siberia as far as Kamschatka and also in North America. The variety found in the Alps is the nearest to the cultivated form.' Most probably it was known to the Ancients, as it grows wild in Greece and Italy. Dodoens figures it and gives the French name for it in his days: '*Petit poureau*,' relating to its rush-like appearance. In present day French it is commonly called '*Ail civitte*.' The Latin name of this species means 'Rush-Leek.'

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**---Description---**The plant is a hardy perennial. The bulbs grow very close together in dense tufts or clusters, and are of an elongated form, with white, rather firm sheaths, the outer sheath sometimes grey.

The slender leaves appear early in spring and are long, cylindrical and hollow, tapering to a point and about the thickness of a crow's quill. They grow from 6 to 10 inches high.

The flowering stem is usually nipped off with cultivated plants (which are grown solely for the sake of the leaves, or 'grass'), but when allowed to rise, it seldom reaches more than a few inches to at most a foot in height. It is hollow and either has no leaf or one leaf sheathing it below the middle. It supports a close globular head, or umbel, of purple flowers; the numerous flowers are densely packed together on separate, very slender little flower-stalks, shorter than the flowers themselves, which lengthen slightly as the fruit ripens, causing the heads to assume a conical instead of a round shape. The petals of the flowers are nearly half an inch long; when dry, their pale-purple colour, which has in Parts a darker flush, changes to rose-colour. The anthers (the pollen-bearing part of the flower) are of a bluish-purple colour. The seed-vessel, or capsule, is a little larger than a hemp seed and is completely concealed within the petals, which are about twice its length. The small seeds which it contains are black when ripe and similar to Onion seeds.

The flowers are in blossom in June and July, and in the most cold and moist situations will mature their seeds, though rarely allowed to do so under cultivation.

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**---Cultivation---**The Chive will grow in any ordinary garden soil. It can be raised by seed, but is usually propagated by dividing the clumps in spring or autumn. In dividing the clumps, leave about six little bulbs together in a tiny clump, which will spread to a fine clump in the course of a year, and may then be divided. Set the clumps from 9 inches to a foot apart each way. For a *quick return*, propagation

by division of the bulb clumps is always to be preferred.

The green from the clumps can be cut three or four times in the season. When required for use, each clump may be cut in turn, fairly close to the ground. The leaves will soon grow again and be found more tender each time of cutting. By carefully cropping, the 'grass' can be obtained quite late in the season, until the early frosts come, when it withers up and disappears through the winter, pushing up again in the first warm days of February. For early crops, a little 'grass' can be forced on the clumps by placing cloches or a 'light' over them.

Beyond weeding between the clumps, no further care or attention is needed after division. Beds should be re-planted at least once in three or four years.

If it is desired to produce seed, grow two plantations, one for producing 'grass' for use, and the other to be left to flower and set seed, as you cannot get the two crops - 'grass' and seed, off the one set of plants.

**---Uses---**The Chive contains a pungent volatile oil, rich in sulphur, which is present in all the Onion tribe and causes their distinctive smell and taste.

It is a great improvement to salads - cut fresh and chopped fine-and may be put not only into green salads, but also into cucumber salad, or sprinkled on sliced tomatoes.

Chives are also excellent in savoury omelettes, and may be chopped and boiled with potatoes that are to be mashed, or chopped fresh and sprinkled, just before serving, on mashed potatoes, both as a garnish and flavouring. They may also be put into soup, either dried, or freshly cut and finely chopped, and are a welcome improvement to homemade sausages, croquettes, etc., as well as an excellent addition to beefsteak puddings and pies.

Chives are also useful for cutting up and mixing with the food of newly-hatched turkeys.

Parkinson mentions Chives as being cultivated in his garden, among other herbs.