

## Garlic Chives Make a Pleasing Addition to the Garden



*Photo by Marie Harrison, UF-IFAS Okaloosa County Master Gardener: Plant garlic chives in full to part sun in well-drained, fertile ground.*

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Before I prepare dinner, I usually visit the herb garden. Several tasty plants grow there year round, and something can always be found to add just the right dash of flavor to whatever I'm preparing at the time.

I snip this and that, and almost always, a little bundle of garlic chives are among my pickings. I grow them for their flavorful leaves and flowers. Unlike onions and other kinds of garlic, the tough, fibrous bulb is not eaten. It is easily distinguished from onion chives because the leaves are flat and grasslike and not hollow like onion chives.

Garlic chives are at home in the flower border as well as in the herb garden. Attractive flower clusters composed of many small, creamy white, star-shaped flowers stand well above the foliage on sturdy stalks. Fresh flowers are long-lasting in floral designs and dried seed heads may be used in everlasting arrangements. The grasslike plants make excellent edging along a mixed border or along a path, and a dense groundcover can be made by planting them in broad sweeps in the landscape.

Plant garlic chives in full to part sun in well-drained, fertile ground. Although they are drought tolerant, they thrive in moderately moist soil. After freezing weather they may get killed to the ground. They will, however, return reliably in spring. Fertilize them as they emerge with slow release fertilizer.

Usually garlic chives are propagated by division of established clumps every 3-4 years. They are also easily

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started from seed. As a matter of fact, they self-seed and may become invasive in the garden if seed heads are not removed before they fall to the ground. I always pick the flowers and either toss them into salads or make a pretty, violet scented bouquet for the table. If treated this way, they won't become pests. If additional plants are wanted, seeds can be allowed to fall on the ground. Some gardeners choose to plant the seeds in containers and set new plants in the garden after they become a few inches tall.

Although I have seen only the white-flowered variety, a mauve-flowered variety is available in the trade, and several cultivars may be ordered, especially from Asian growers.

The sweet and garlicky flavor of garlic chives adds a distinctive flavor to soups, stir fries, and egg and fish dishes. Like onion chives, they may be chipped and sprinkled over potatoes and gravies. Leaves and flowers make tasty additions to salads. Harvest by cutting entire blades all the way to the ground. Keep tender, peppery sprouts handy all winter by planting a few of the seeds in a window-sill container. Clip and use as needed.

Garlic chives have several medicinal uses. They will stimulate the appetite and help improve digestion. They also have a diuretic effect and help promote blood circulation in the mucous membranes. That seems all the more reason to grow and enjoy this very versatile herb.

### **At a Glance**

*Allium tuberosum*

*Say:* AL-ee-um too-ber-OH-sum

*Family:* Alliaceae (Allium Family)

*Other names:* Chinese Chives, Chinese Garlic, Chinese Leeks, Flowering Chives, Oriental Garlic, Yellow Chives

*Origin:* Southeast Asia

*Zones:* 4-8

*Light:* Sun to part sun

*Water Use Zone:* Moderate

*Size:* 12-15" (foliage) 2-3' (in flower)

*Soil:* well-drained

*Salt tolerance:* Slight