

# Garlic Chive, Chinese Chive, Gow Choy

*Allium tuberosum* is a member of the Amaryllidaceae (amaryllis) family. Varieties are usually listed as Chinese Chive or Garlic Chive.

This perennial plant grows in a clump and spreads by means of well-developed rhizomes. The plant grows to 12 to 18 inches' height. Each poorly developed bulb has four to five long, thin, flat leaves that bend downward at the tip. Garlic chives are grown very little in the United States, but extensively in China and in Japan. The flowers, usually white but sometimes purple, are distinctively shaped, starlike with a flat top umbel, more like those of the common chive than like the round ball that typifies garlic, leek, or onion.

**Other names.** *Ndoh dah* (Hmong); *nira* (Japanese); *jiu tsai*, *kau tsai*, or *kui tsai* (Mandarin Chinese); *gow choy* (Cantonese Chinese); *gil choy* (Chinese).

## Market Information

By blanching Chinese chives, you can increase their price to \$3 or \$4 per pound. Blanching makes the chives more aromatic. To blanch, use tents of dark paper or some other material to exclude light from the growing plants. You can alternate crops of green and blanched chives.

**Use.** The flat, grasslike leaves are used like common chives. The flowers are also commonly eaten. Both have a garlic flavor. The bulbs can also be harvested and used like garlic cloves. Chinese chives have long been used as an herbal medicine to aid recovery from fatigue.

## Culture

**Propagation and care.** Chinese chives prefer cool climates or temperatures. Production is best in spring. Flowering comes in the summer, and most varieties go dormant in hot weather. Growth will resume in the fall and become slow in winter. Chinese chives can be started from seed, usually in late winter or early spring. Once started, proper culture can keep the same planting productive for



Chinese chives (garlic chives) grow to heights of 12 to 18 inches. (Photo: Mike Murray)



Chinese chives at the Los Angeles wholesale market. The flat grasslike leaves have a garlic flavor. (Photo: Hunter Johnson)

10 years or more. Frequent nitrogenous fertilization and frequent but light watering are important for continued growth.

## Sources

### Seed

American Takii Inc., 301 Natividad Road, Salinas, CA 93906

Johnny's Selected Seeds, Foss Hill Road, Albion, ME 04910

Nichols Garden Nursery, 1190 North Pacific Highway, Albany, OR 97321

Park Seed Co., Cokesbury Road, Greenwood, SC 29647-0001

Sakata Seeds, 18695 Serene Drive, Morgan Hill, CA 95037

Seeds Blüm, Idaho City Stage, Boise, ID 83706

Shepherd's Garden Seeds, Shipping Office, 30 Irene Street, Torrington, CT 06790

Sunrise Enterprises, P.O. Box 10058, Elmwood, CT 06110-0058

Taylor's Herb Gardens, 1525 Lone Oak Road, Vista, CA 92084

Tsang and Ma, P.O. Box 5644, Redwood City, CA 94063

### More information

Brewster, James, and Haim Rabinowitch. 1989. *Onions and allied crops*. CRC Press, Inc., Boca Raton, FL.

Harrington, Geri. 1984. *Grow your own Chinese vegetables*. Garden Way Publishing, Pownal, VT.

Jones, Henry, and Louis Mann. 1963. *Onions and their allies*. Interscience Publishers Inc., New York, NY.

Rubatzky, Vincent, and Mas Yamaguchi. 1997. *World vegetables, 2d ed.* Chapman and Hall, New York, NY.

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