Edible and Ornamental Allium

Lily Family
- One of the largest plant families with over 250 genera and almost 4000 species, most characterized by some kind of bulbs or other storage organs
- Includes flowers such as lilies, tulips and hyacinth, and vegetables such as asparagus as well as allium.

History of Allium

Advantages of growing your own

Site Preparation
- Work compost in deeply to improve drainage
- Add fertilizer to a depth of 5 or 6 inches

Cultivating Allium
- Provide water if rain is inadequate
- Weed frequently
- Mulch to preserve water and suppress weeds
- When growth resumes in Spring add nutrients though
  - Side dressing
  - Foliar feeding

Fertilizers

Bulbing (Dry) Onions (*Allium cepa*)
- Choosing which ones to grow—Consider color, size, flavor, days to maturity, storage quality, day length
- Day Length
  - Short Day (12-14 hours): Torpedo, Maui, Bermuda
  - Long Day (14-16 hours): Walla Walla, White Sweet Spanish
  - Intermediate Day or Day Neutral (14 hours): Superstar, Stockton (all colors), Crimson, Candy
- Storage Quality (White and Yellow Onions)
  - Short Keepers: Superstar, Candy
  - Mid-Keepers: White and Yellow Sweet Spanish, Utah, Walla Walla
  - Good Storage White and Yellow: Southern White Globe, Giant Zittau, Alisa Craig
- Storage Quality (Red Onions)
  - Short-Keepers: Red Torpedo, Stockton Early Red, Red Candy Apple
  - Long-Keepers: Rosso di Milano, Tropeana Tonda, Rossi di Toscano

Starting Bulbing Onions
- Sets
- Seeds
- Transplants
- Time planting so that plant is smaller than pencil during coldest months
- Growing Guidelines for Bulbing Onions
- Amend soil and fertilize well before planting
- Space 3-4 inches apart
- Make sure onions are receiving water regularly
- Mulch and keep free of weeds
- Feed once or twice when onions begin to show growth in the spring
- When bulbs are large, necks soften, and about half the leaves turn brown, stop watering and bend remaining leaves down

- **Harvesting and Curing Bulbing Onions**
  - For fresh eating, dig up when bulbed up
  - To store, leave onions in ground for a week or two after bending down the tops
  - Then pull up and let dry out of direct sun for a few days
  - When tops dry they can be cut off or braided
  - Store in a cool, dry place
  - Using your onions
  - Within varieties use biggest ones and most elongated ones first
  - Hotter varieties usually keep longer than milder, sweeter ones
  - Long day types keep better than short-day types
  - In general white are poorest keepers, red intermediate, and yellow best keepers

**Scallions (Allium fistulosum)**
- Also known as Japanese bunching onions, multiplier onions, Welsh onions, green onions, and Egyptian walking onions
- Grow like bulbing onions but closer together
- Will bolt with age

**Garlic (Allium sativum, Allium ophioscorodon)**
- Softneck Garlic (Allium sativum) Does not develop scapes
  - Has more cloves per bulb than hardneck, varying in size
  - Tends to be more successful in mild winter climates than hardneck
  - Can be braided
- Hardneck Garlic (Allium ophioscorodon) Develops scapes
  - Has fewer cloves per bulb than softneck, but more uniform in size, arranged in a circular layer around the central stem and easier to peel
  - More highly colored and attractive than softneck
  - Difficult to braid

- **Planting Garlic**
  - Purchase certified disease-free garlic from a nursery or catalog
  - Plant mid-October through November in full sun in moist soil
  - Carefully separate the cloves from each other and the basal plate, keeping the protective wrapper intact
  - Use only the largest cloves
  - Plant flat end (basal plate) down with pointy end about 1" below the surface and gently firm soil
  - Wait until shoots emerge before watering for the first time

- **Growing Guidelines:**
  - Amend soil well before planting
  - Mulch and keep free of weeds
- Check soil and water if necessary
- Feed once or twice when garlic begins to show growth in the spring
- Stop watering on Mother’s Day; harvest on Father’s Day

**Rust on garlic**
- Appears as reddish to dull orange oval-shaped pustules on leaf blades
- Can appear dark later in season due to black teliospores developing within the pustules
- Appears sporadically and mild infection does little damage to bulbs
- If severe, destroy all plants and rotate allium away for 2 to 3 years

**Elephant Garlic**
- Closer to a leek in taste
- Grown like garlic

**Shallots**
- Growing Guidelines:
  - Traditionally planted as bulbs like garlic
  - Plant, grow and harvest as you do garlic, but allow 6 to 8 inches per plant
  - Recently seeds have become available for planting
  - Plant outside in February, 1/2 inch deep, 2 inches apart for single bulbs, wider for clusters
  - Start inside 10 to 12 weeks earlier
  - Seed started shallots mature later than fall planted bulbs

**Leeks**
- Growing Guidelines:
  - Plant seeds indoors Dec.-Jan. or outdoors Jan.-March
  - Plant or thin to 3 to 6 inches apart
  - If transplanting, bury leek to the base of the first leek joint
  - Planting in fall is a gamble as leeks are more likely to bolt
  - If you plan to harvest them young (thin) you can plant any time
  - Both summer and winter leeks grow well in our climate; summer leeks are more tender but can withstand our mild winters.
  - As the leek grows, cover the shaft to blanch the stem

**Harvesting leeks**
- Pull up baby leeks whenever needed
- Harvest mature leeks when over 1” in diameter, usually not until September
- Harvest as needed during the winter
- Carefully loosen up leek so as not to pierce or break
- Complete harvesting by mid-March of year after planting or plants will go to seed

**Chives**
- Growing Guidelines:
  - Easily grown from seed but slow to mature so better to buy plants from nursery
  - Amend soil well before planting or grow in pots
  - Perennial so choose a permanent location and keep free of weeks
○ Fertilize in ground two times a year during growing season (more frequently in pots)
○ Divide every 2-4 years in clumps of 6-8 bulbs placed 8” apart
○ When harvesting clip leaves at base to stimulate new growth

Garlic Chives
● Growing Guidelines:
  ○ Can buy from nursery or grow from seed
  ○ Seed between January and April indoors or directly in the garden
  ○ Prepare soil as for all allium
  ○ Keep evenly moist
  ○ Every few years dig up plant, divide into parts with a shovel, and transplant clumps 18” apart
  ○ Harvest whole plant and replant next year, or pick individual leaves as needed

Edible Allium as Ornamentals

Ornamental Allium
● Bulbs with single leafless stems topped with roundish flowers
● Also called Flowering Onion and Giant Allium, they are not edible
● Some are fragrant; others smell like onions or garlic, giving off scent only when cut or bruised
● Make durable and attractive cut flowers
● Each head is composed of hundreds of tiny blooms packed tightly together in a globe or loose cluster
● They bloom from spring through summer in colors including white, yellow, pink, reddish, lavender, blue and purple
● Small or medium size allium look striking when planted together in a mass
● Larger ones, sited individually, make striking accents in the garden
● Care of ornamental allium
  ○ Plant in spring or fall
  ○ Can be started from seed
  ○ Most need full sun though some tolerate some shade
  ○ Grow rapidly in spring, produce blooms, then die back
  ○ Foliage must be allowed to wither naturally so allium will bloom again in the spring
  ○ Some require frequent division (about 3 years); others can be left undisturbed for years until fewer blooms signal overcrowding
● Dividing ornamental allium
  ○ To divide during bloom separate out bulblets from blooming clusters and replant
  ○ To divide when dormant, remove flower stems after flowering, and in spring separate and replant the tiny bulblets