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Chives in the Garden

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Summary

Chives are cool-season, cold-tolerant perennials that prefer full sun and fertile, well-drained soils. Seeds should be planted $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep and final plant spacing should be 4-6 inches apart in all directions. Mulches may be used to conserve water and control weeds. Control weeds, insects and diseases throughout the year. Harvest chives by cutting the leaves back to within 1-2 inches of the soil. Use chives fresh or dry them for storage.



Recommended Varieties

Check with your local garden center for seed varieties available. Talk with a friend or local gardener to see if you can get divisions from their established plants.

How to Grow

Soils: Chives will grow in all soil types provided they are rich, well drained, moist, and fertile. **Soil Preparation:** Before planting, incorporate 4-6 inches of well-composted organic matter. Apply 2-3 tablespoons of all-purpose fertilizer (16-16-8) per square foot of planting area. Work compost and fertilizer into the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches.

Plants: Chives can be grown from seeds, transplants, or divisions. Seed chives as early as possible in the spring. Seeds should be planted $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep and thinned to 4-6 inches in all directions after emergence. Transplants need 6-8 weeks of growth before planting in the garden. Transplants or divisions can be planted in late April or early May. In addition to regular chives, there are garlic chives that have a mild garlicky flavor. Regular or garlic chive seeds or transplants are available at most garden centers.

Planting and Spacing: Chives, regardless of planting method (seeds or transplants), should be spaced 4-6 inches apart. Dividing existing plants into smaller units easily propagates chives. Chive beds should be renovated (divided) every 2-3 years. Chives may be grown as an indoor plant. Plant in pots filled with potting soil. Water and feed regularly to maintain growth. Make sure the plants receive plenty of light especially during the winter months.

Water: Chives require regular watering throughout growth for best production. Soils need to be maintained near field capacity. Moisten the soil thoroughly when watering. Chives will survive periods of drought stress but growth and productivity will decrease.

Fertilization: Chives need little additional fertilizer for optimum yields. Sidedress in May and July with 1 teaspoon of 21-0-0 per square foot to ensure good growth and high yields.

Mulches and Row Covers: Organic mulches help conserve water, supply extra nutrients, and reduce weeding.

Problems

Weeds: Control weeds through regular cultivation but avoid root damage that slows plant growth by damaging shallow roots. Mulches may also be used to control weeds. Weed control is particularly important during the first 2 months of growth when plants are growing slowly and compete poorly.

Insects and Diseases:

Insect	Identification	Control
Thrips	Tiny, slender insects that feed on leaves. Leaves turn silver or gray, may twist and die. Thrips hide near where the leaf and bulb meet.	Spray with registered chemicals
Root Maggot	White worm that feeds on seedlings, roots or bulbs.	Apply diazinon granules at planting.
Disease	Identification	Control
Pink Root	Fungal disease that changes roots to a pink color. Roots eventually die and yields severely reduced.	Use 5-year crop rotation. Solarize the soil where chives to be planted.
Downey Mildew	Fungal disease that turns leaves a light tan to brown color. Furry growth, grayish violet in color, may be visible on the surface of infected leaves during moist periods.	Cultural practices that facilitate air movement and drying of leaves will reduce disease severity. Registered fungicides may be used.

Harvest and Storage

Chives may be harvested as early as 60 days after seeding or 30 days after transplanting. Harvest the leaves with scissors or a knife, cutting the plants back to within 1-2 inches of the soil. Harvest 3-4 times during the first year. In subsequent years, cut plants back monthly. Harvest potted chives in a similar manner to garden chives. Chives generally flower in May and June. The small purple flowers and stalks are unpalatable and should be discarded. Chives may be used fresh or dried for later use. Store dried chives in a resealable container in a cool, dry place.

Productivity

One chive seed will produce a clump of chives in a matter of a couple months. The clump can then be harvested as outlined above. 20-25 plants will provide enough chives for fresh and dried use.

Nutrition

A 1 tablespoon serving of raw chives is low in Saturated Fat, and very low in cholesterol and sodium. It is also a good source of thiamin, phosphorus and zinc, and a very good source of dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate, calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium and copper.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How big do chives get? Over time, chives will form a clump that is 8-10 inches tall and may spread nearly one foot across. You will find that the plants are most productive if they are divided regularly.

Q. When is the best time to divide my chives? When dividing plants, do it in the spring. Let the plants re-establish themselves for several weeks before beginning to harvest them again. If you want to grow some indoors, dig and divide in the autumn and replant them outdoors the following spring.

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