**Chives**

By: Ellen Ellingsworth, MS, UW-Stout Dietetic Intern

1. **What are Chives?**
   1. Chives are a perennial herb which resembles hollow blades of grass, and is the smallest member of the onion family.
   2. The chive plant, scientifically known as Allium schoenoprasum, is a member of the onion family and is related to garlic. It is the oldest species of edible onion known.
   3. The botanical name actually comes from the Greek meaning, "reed-like leek”.
   4. This herb is native to Britain, Northern Europe and North America. They are the easiest to grow of the fresh herbs used for culinary purposes.
   5. Chives have a mild onion taste.
   6. Did you know: The entire chive plant is edible? The leaves, blossoms, and even bulbs, all find uses in the kitchen.
2. **History of Chives**
   1. The first recorded use of chives occurred in China in about 3000 B.C. Some say that Marco Polo may have brought the idea to use chives back with him from the East. However, there is no real evidence for their common use until about the 1500s when they found their way into dishes and herb gardens**.**
   2. Chives are native to both Europe and Asia. It grows wild all across both regions, but there are slight variations in different locations. A variety found in the Alps is the one nearest to what is generally cultivated today.
3. **Health Benefits**
4. Chives contain multiple vitamins and minerals including: Vitamin K, A and C, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and sodium.
5. Chives are known to be a mild anti-inflammatory.
6. They have some antibiotic properties, like the other plants in the allium group (onions, garlic, et al).
7. Scientific research shows that chives may stimulate the body's digestion of fat. Eaten regularly, chives may help lower blood cholesterol levels.
8. The high vitamin C content in chives has been proposed to help prevent colds. They can also speed recovery if a cold develops by helping the body to expel mucus; the sulfurous compounds in chives are natural expectorants.
9. The medicinal properties of chives are as varied as their uses in the kitchen. Chives may stimulate appetite and promote good digestion.

1. **Growing, Harvesting, Selection, Storage, and Preparation**
   1. Growing: Chives are easy to grow. Since they are perennials, they grow back each spring, and are one of the first things we can eat each year. Chives grow well outside anywhere in your landscaping or thrive indoors on a sunny windowsill. Every three or four years, divide the bulbs, so that they keep proliferating.
   2. Harvesting: Chive plants flower in May or June - the flowers are tasty in salads. The stems are great in omelettes, potatoes, soups, etc. During the growing season, the plant will continually regrow leaves, allowing for a continuous harvest.
   3. Gardening enthusiasts appreciate the purple blossoms because they enhance pollination throughout a garden because they attract bees, while the compounds in the stems repel several species of garden pests, including Japanese beetles**.**
   4. **Chives** in the garden can also reduce the incidence of fungal diseases and mildew.
   5. Selection: Look for slender green chives with a uniform green color and no signs of wilting or browning.
   6. Storage: Chives are most flavorful when used fresh. However chives can be stored. Chives can be stored cut up or in bunches in plastic in the refrigerator for up to a week. Chives can be frozen to be stored longer by chopping up prewashed leaves into small pieces and freezing them in plastic containers. It is not necessary to thaw pieces out before using. Chives can also be dried in a dehydrator. Dried chives may be placed in small jars and stored. In this form they can be used anywhere you might ordinarily use dried onions
   7. Preparation: the entire chive may be eaten, from the flower, to the leaves, and down to the bulb.
   8. Perhaps the most popular use for the chive is to cut the leaves into 1/4-inch pieces to sprinkle on top of a baked potato, providing a crunchy, light, oniony addition to a sour cream topping.
   9. Chives are also commonly used in soups and dips.
   10. An unusual and colorful twist is to use the flower as an exciting garnish for a soup, or broken up it can be spread over a salad.
   11. Chives can be used in many places where onions might also enter. Try putting them in a stuffing recipe, or adding to most soups. They are very versatile, great fresh or dried.
   12. Generally, put them in late during cooking to preserve their crispness or snipped and sprinkled on food just before serving for seasoning.
2. **Fun Facts:** 
   1. Chives are usually referred only in the plural, because they grow in clumps rather than alone.
   2. Medieval gardeners often planted chives around the borders for both decoration and to ward off harmful insects. It was thought that hanging bunches of chives around a house could also ward off evil.
   3. Medicinally, **chives** have been used for thousands of years in traditional Chinese medicine to promote sweating and male fertility.
   4. Romanian Gypsies use chives for fortunetelling.





