

Common Name: **Onion**

Genus: *Allium*

Species: *cepa*

Family: Alliaceae

AKA: Common Onion, White Onion, Spanish Onion



## Historical Uses:

**Medical:** "...But they are all of them of a biting qualitie and inflative, inviting of an appetite, extenuating, breeding thirst, causing naseousnes, purging, good for the belly, opeing ye passages of other excrements, soe also of ye Haemorrhoids. They are given for a suppositorie, being first peeled, and cast into oyle. But the juice being anointed on with Hony, doth help such as are dull of sight, the Argemae, the Nuberculae, & such as beginne to be troubled with suffusions, and the Anginosi also, being anointed on. It doth both move & expel ye menstrua, & being infuses it is a purger of the head, by the Nostrill. It is a Cataplasme with salt, and Rue, and Hony for such as are bitten of doggs... With pultries grease it is good for shooe galls, and for the flux of the belly, & for hardnesse of hearing, and for noyse in ye eares, and for purulent eares: it is good also for the dropping down of water in ye eares, & for the Alopecieae being rubd on, for it doth sooner call out ye haire than Alcyonium..." (1)



"The Onions do bite, attenuate, or make thinne, and cause drinesse: being boyled they doe lose their sharpnesse, especially if the water be twice or thrice changed, and yet for all that they doe not lose their attenuating qualitie. They also breake winde, provoke urine, and be more soluble boyled than raw; and raw they nourish not at all, and but a little though they be boyled. They be naught for those that are cholericke, but good for such as are replete with raw and flegmaticke humors; and for women that have their termes stayed upon a cold cause, by reason they open the passages that are stopped... The juyce of Onions sniffed up into the nose, purgeth the head, and draweth forth raw flegmaticke humors. Stamped with salt, rew, and honey, and so applied, they are good against the biting of a mad Dog. Rosted in the embers, and applied, they ripen and breake cold Apostumes, Biles, and such like... The juice anointed upon a pild or bald head in the sunne, bringing againe the haire very speedily." (2)



“...Onions are flatulent, or windy...they also kill worms in children, if they drink the water fasting, wherein they have been steeped all night. Being roasted under the embers, and eaten with honey, or sugar and oil, they much conduce to help an inveterate cough, and expectorate the tough phlegm. The juice being snuffed up the nostrils, purges the head, and helps the lethargy... The juice of onions is good for either scalding or burning by fire, water, or gunpowder; used with vinegar, takes away all blemishes, spots, and marks in the skin and dropped into the ears, eases the pain and noise of them. Applied also with figs beaten together, helps to ripen and break imposthumes, and other sores.” (3)

**Culinary:** “Onion [umlauch] does not have the right warmth, but has sharp moisture. It grows from the dew that is present around daybreak when the powers of the dew are disappearing. It is as harmful and poisonous to eat as the juice of other useless herbs. It is healthy to eat cooked because the harmful elements that are in it are lessened through fire. It is good cooked for those who have ague, fever, or gout. For those, however, who have a sick or weak stomach, it creates suffering, either raw or cooked, because of its moisture.” (4)

**Household:** “...outer skin provides a dyestuff.” (5)

**Folklore/Astrology:** “*Mars* owns them; and they have gotten this quality, to draw any corruption to them; for if you peel one, and lay it upon a dunghill, you shall find him rotten in half a day, by drawing putrefaction to it...” (6)

“The onion sprang from under Satan’s heel when he fled from Paradise after causing the fall of man. The onion is said to be warm in the fourth degree and somewhat moist; it is under the domain of Mars. In Egypt, it symbolized the universe because of its concentric layers, and it was forbidden as food to the priesthood,



Close-up of the Onion flower head

although others may eat it. When the goddess **Latona** regained her health by eating an onion, the plant became sacred to her. Onions were used to divine the name of a future husband; the candidates' names were written on the outer skin, which was set aside to sprout. The first to do so would reveal the husband's name. An onion suspended in a room would draw to itself all diseases that might otherwise afflict the occupants." (7)

**Cautions:** "...The Onion being eaten, yea though it be boyled, causeth head-ache, hurteth the eyes, and maketh a man dimme sighted, dullereth the senses, ingendreth windinesse, and provoketh overmuch sleepe, especially being eaten raw." (8)

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### Contemporary Uses:

**Parts Used:** Bulb, fresh juice

**Medicinal:** "Antiseptic, diuretic. A roasted Onion is a useful application to tumours or earache. The juice made into a syrup is good for colds and coughs. Hollands gin, in which Onions have been macerated, is given as a cure for gravel and dropsy." (9)

"Internally for bronchial and gastric infections (liquid extract of bulbs). Externally for acne and boils." (10)

**Culinary:** "Cooked or raw, onions are indispensable as a flavoring for most meat and vegetable dishes, sauces, stocks, and chutneys. They are also eaten raw or cooked as a vegetable and as pickles with bread and cheese. Dehydrated onion is an ingredient of salt substitutes. Fermented onion paste, *hrous*, is used as a flavoring for couscous, stews, and soups (Tunisia)." (11)

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**Area of Origin:** Originally western Asia

**Physical description:** Robust biennial with a bulb to 4" across, and hollow leaves, semi-circular in cross-section, to 16" long.

**Plant type:** Biennial

**Height:** 4'

**Flower color:** Green-white, star-shaped

**Flowering period:** June-August

**Soil type/requirements:** Rich, well-drained soil

**Hardiness zone:** USDA 4-9

**Sun requirements:** Full sun

**Propagation:** By seed sown in autumn or spring; by small bulbs planted in spring.

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### Sources

1. Dioscorides, p. 188
2. Gerard, p. 169-171
3. Culpepper, p. 109
4. Von Bingen, p.78
5. Anderson, p. 20-21

6. Culpepper, p. 109
7. Anderson, p. 20-21
8. Gerard, p. 169-171
9. Grieve, p. 599
10. Bown, p. 112-114
11. Ibid

**Illustrations/Images:**

1. Gerard's Herbal      1633 ed.
2. PSUMG                2012
3. PSUMG                2012