

COASTAL HOME

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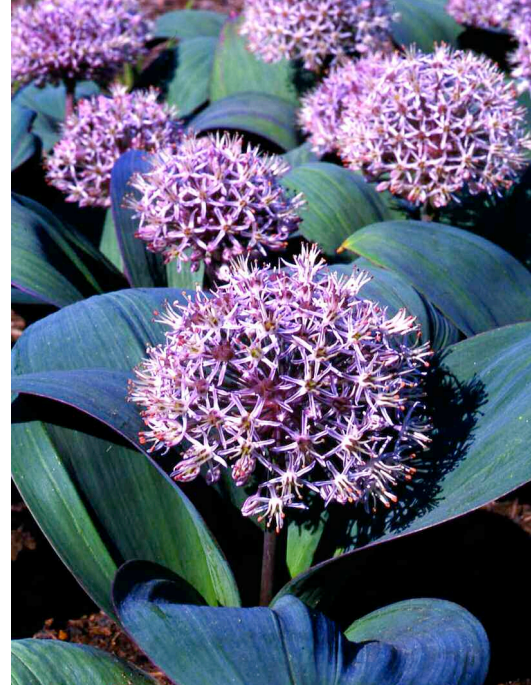


At Home

WITH THOMAS MOSER
Revered furniture maker lives his craft

A LIFE IN PICTURES
Iconic photographer Ozzie Sweet reflects

CULTIVATING DELIGHT
Byfield couple creates a garden with soul



This page clockwise: Silvery *Allium cristophii* forms airy spheres of stars that shine brightly alongside purplish-blue salvias. Woodland plantings, perennial beds and containers sparkle in summer from the cheerful yellow flowers of *Allium moly*. The beautiful broad foliage of *Allium karataviense* 'Red Globe' looks nearly as attractive as the rose-red spheres. *Allium* 'Globemaster' soars elegantly alone to accent a garden wall, or as a captivating companion to pastel roses, shrubs and perennials, as shown below. Charming cup-shaped flowers of *Nectaroscordum siculum* attract applause in the garden and later dry well for flower arrangements. Delicate pink blooms last for weeks on dainty and delightful *Allium roseum*. Facing page: *Allium* 'Globemaster' dazzles in sunlight. Photo right courtesy of Victoria J. Williams; all other photos courtesy of White Flower Farm, whiteflowerfarm.com.



"I will not move my army without onions!"

—Ulysses S. Grant



ALLURING ALLIUMS

Astonishing Plants for the Kitchen and Garden

From the humble onion to its ornamental relatives, alliums are fabulous plants for cooks and gardeners. Among the world's largest plant genera, the genus *Allium* features hundreds of species—many planted in autumn for spring and summer beauty. Alliums are also often deer- and rodent-resistant, easy to grow and pest-free.

Acclaimed cookbook author and food editor Maggie Waldron said, "It's probably illegal to make soups, stews and casseroles without plenty of onions." After all, the edible alliums—onions, garlic, leeks and shallots—are among our most popular culinary ingredients, even if we do take them for granted.

The ordinary onion has been celebrated since the earliest times. Onions were grown in Chinese gardens 5,000 years ago, making them among the world's oldest cultivated vegetables. In Ancient Egypt, the onion was highly revered. The circle-within-a-circle structure symbolized eternal life. Onions and garlic were used in funeral offerings and on altars to the gods. Slaves

WRITTEN BY TERESA O'CONNOR

who built the pyramids were fed large amounts of onions, garlic and leeks, and before being killed by Pompeii's volcano in AD 79, Pliny the Elder reported the city's onions were being used to heal mouth sores, toothaches and dog bites. Onions also starred in *Apicius*, the sole surviving cookbook from the Roman Empire. And in medieval England, most meals featured leeks, onions and garlic. Onions were called "ceps" from their Latin name (*Allium cepa*), and often eaten raw. To relieve discomfort, onion slices were rubbed onto insect bites and bee stings.

A+ For Health

"My own remedy is always to eat...just before I step into bed, a hot roasted onion if I have a cold."

—George Washington

Modern science is now learning what earlier cultures knew about alliums: they're healthful. Edible alliums have phytochemicals with powerful antioxidant, antiviral and antibacterial properties. They also help reduce cancers, lower blood pressure and dissolve blood clots. Especially beneficial in autumn and winter, garlic and onions are effective decongestants and expectorants for common colds; regular doses may prevent chronic bronchitis. As temperatures drop, add plenty of onions, leeks, shallots and garlic to your meals. You'll not only boost your immune system, your kitchen will smell heavenly.

Growing Edible Alliums

While onions are planted in spring, garlic should be started in autumn for a summer harvest. Cold-hardy varieties include 'German Extra Hardy' and 'Siberian'. Plant garlic after the first light frost (32°F) but before the first hard frost (28°F or below). Garlic performs best in fertile, well-drained soil in full sun. Plant individual cloves, with papery husks still on, two inches deep, four to six inches apart in rows. Mulch well to suppress weeds and prevent cloves from heaving out of the ground during frosts. It is best not to plant garlic where alliums have grown over the last three years.

Growing Ornamental Alliums

Ornamental alliums, which are close cousins to onions and garlic, are stars in the garden. When these attractive alliums are in bloom, they will likely steal the show. Wildly diverse, ornamental onions feature everything from spiky and smooth flowers with small dangling cups to round balls larger than melons. Blossoms can hover a few inches off the ground or soar nearly five feet tall, with colors from pure white and purple to pink and yellow. Alliums are pretty in perennial beds, where they spotlight neighboring plants. In return, these companions hide alliums' leaves when they turn scraggly. Seed heads keep their shapes and look spectacular in gardens and vases long after flowers fade.

Plant Outdoors, Enjoy Indoors

In fall, plant ornamental alliums with pointy ends up in well-drained soil, enriched with organic matter. Generally, bulbs are planted about three to four times as deep as the bulbs are wide. Space smaller bulbs one to two inches apart, larger ones three to six inches. Feed with a bulb fertilizer as shoots emerge in the spring and after blooming.

Combine different alliums in different lengths for dramatic displays inside. A single allium looks striking when floating in a shallow dish. Remove the oniony smell of cut alliums with a couple of drops of bleach in the water.

Six Stars To Consider

Allium cristophii: Airy spheres of silvery amethyst grow to the size of softballs on this attractive allium, which reaches one to three feet tall. In early summer, flowers grow ten to twelve inches in diameter. This heirloom is delightful near roses, salvias and chartreuse sprays of lady's mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*), as well as with ornamental grasses. Full sun.

Allium 'Globemaster': This well-loved hybrid has silvery pinkish-purple globes—comprised of hundreds of star-shaped florets—which grow eight to ten inches in May and June. This showstopper grows two to three feet tall, and combines well with irises, peonies and alyssum. Sun/partial sun.

Allium karataviense: Shorter stems and beautiful foliage adorn this allium species, which grows ten to twelve inches tall. Sweetly scented pink spheres bloom in spring. It is stunning in rock gardens with sedums and snow-in-summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*). Try 'Ivory Queen' for white blooms or 'Red Globe' for red-violet flowers. Sun/partial sun.

Allium roseum: In late spring, this heirloom bursts into long-lasting, delicate pink clusters held aloft by twelve to fifteen inch stems. Ten or more together create focal points in sunny, well-drained locations. It is charming in containers. Sun/partial shade.

Allium moly: Loose umbels of starry yellow flowers perch on ten to twelve inch stems in summer. This allium is ideal for woodlands and rock gardens, as well as in front of *Campanula persicifolia* and other perennials. Full sun.

Nectaroscordum siculum: This allium relative has beautiful bell-shaped flowers that hang gracefully from two to three foot stems in late spring. Well suited for containers and rock gardens, the pale pink and cream/tan blossoms are beloved by bees and dry beautifully. Sun/partial sun.

All bulbs above are hardy to Zone 4, except 'Globemaster' (Zone 5).

Whether you're creating drama with ornamental onions in the garden or sautéing a bunch of aromatic alliums in the kitchen, these plants are sure to please the most discerning cook and gardener. ■