PLANT FACT SHEET

Allium cepa L.

GENUS *Allium* **FAMILY** Amaryllidaceae

COMMON NAMES Bulb onion

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Bulbs, Seeds, Herb, Spice, Vegetable, Flowers

The bulbs and leaves are used as flavouring raw or cooked.
The flowers are crushed and eaten.

DESCRIPTION

An onion family plant. A herb with a two year life cycle. Normally it develops fattened bulbs at the base. It has a shallow fibrous root system. The actual stem in very short and condensed. Leaves are produced in an alternate fashion one after the other from the top of this stem. Successive leaves grow up inside, then burst through the leaf sheath of the previous leaf. Leaves are thin and long. They are slightly to markedly flattened on the upper surface. Long day lengths and warm temperatures help the leaf bases become swollen and store food reserves. Flowers are greenish white in colour. Flowers develop on a rounded head with stalks all coming from the centre. Flowers in the rounded head open irregularly. There are no bulbils on the flower-head. There are short day cultivars that will form bulbs in the tropics.

HABITAT

A temperate plant. It is more easy to get onions to grow and form bulbs in the highlands in the tropics but they can be grown from sea level to 2600 m altitude in Papua New Guinea. In Nepal they grow to 3000 m altitude. They do not suit the wet humid tropics. Because the day lengths are short near the equator, onions often do not produce a bulb. Some newer varieties will yield in the tropics. It plant grows best at 12-21°C and the bulb forms best at 15-25°C. It grows best with a pH 5.7-6.6. It suits hardiness zones 5-10.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

They are grown from imported seed. For bulbs, a tropical cultivar is needed and bulbing is normally better at higher altitudes. Cultivars which form flowers early need to be avoided. Seedlings can be transplanted.

NOTES

There are about 300-700 Allium species. Most species of Allium are edible (Flora of China). All alliums are edible but they may not all be worth eating!
They have also been put in the family Alliaceae.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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