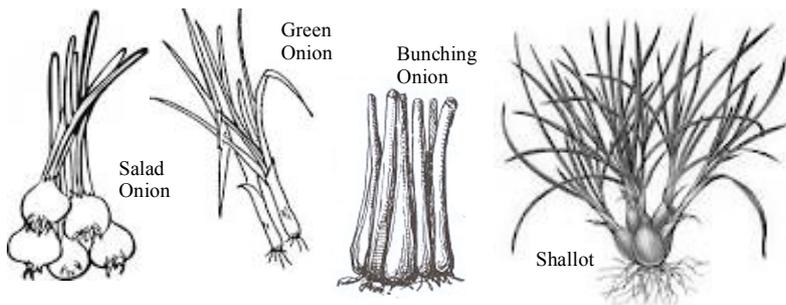


Onion

What would a kitchen be without the distinctively pungent smell and taste of onions? While this vegetable may bring a tear to your eye and pungency to your breath it also brings such delight to your taste buds!

A distinction is made between **dry** onions, which are left in the ground to mature until the tops die down, and **green** onions, which are harvested while still young and before the bulb is fully formed. The (dry) onion, despite its humble look of a plain brown, yellow, white or red, paper-thin skinned bulb, has an intense flavor and is a beloved part of the cuisine of almost every region of the world. Ranging in size from less than 3cm to some 10cm in diameter, onion is found in a wide array of recipes and preparations, be it your favorite salad, or mouth-watering gravy, casseroles or curries. Onion can be cooked in many ways - apart from being used raw or pickled - the four most common methods include sauté, caramelize, grill, and roast. The number of dishes in which onion plays a supporting role, whether to add flavor or served as a garnish, is innumerable, but those in which onion is the principal ingredient are few, I can only think of onion soup, onion tart, onion sauce, onion pickle or chutney. Onions have also been used in traditional medicines since ancient times for their health promoting and curative properties.



If you've ever been confused by different types of green onions displayed at the supermarket or the greengrocer, you are not alone! The names for these vegetables vary depending on the cookbook you read, the supermarket you visit or the person you ask, so much so that no generally valid definitions can be given. The illustrations on the left may help in describing what's generally agreed as "salad onion", "spring

onion", "green onion", "scallion", "bunching onion" and "shallot" or "eschallot".

Salad onion or **Spring onion** (sometimes also called green onion) has small white onion bulb with long green leaves. These in fact are simply the immature plants of any bulb onion, harvested before the bulb is fully formed.

Green onion or **Scallion** has long green leaves with white ends and no bulb.

Another type of onion, commonly called "**Bunching onions**", is a member of the species *fistulosum*, they never form bulbs, instead, there is a cluster of thickened stem bases like a closely packed bunch of spring onions, which they resemble. These onions are known as "Oriental onions", widely used in China, Japan and SE Asia.

Shallot, **Eschalot** or **French Shallot** differs from the regular onion in that the bulbs grow in clusters like garlic, but without the several layers of thin skin that binds garlic cloves into a compact knob. Shallot bulbs are single and elongated with paper-like skin.

Regular bulb onions may be bred and grown to mature at smaller sizes; depending on the purpose for which they are used, they are referred to as **Boiler**, or **Pickle onions**.

Some 'non-food' uses for onions: The pungent juice of onions has been used as a moth repellent and can be rubbed on the skin to prevent insect bites. When applied to the scalp it is said to promote growth of hair and on the face to reduce freckles. It has also been used to polish glass and copperware and to prevent rust on iron. If boiling water is poured onto chopped onions and left to cool, the resulting liquid can be sprayed onto plants to increase their resistance to pests. Onionskins have been used to produce a yellow-brown dye.

Onions and divination: If you want to learn about friends and family far away and out of contact, inscribe names of your beloved on individual onions and left undisturbed until they begin to sprout, the faster the sprouting, the better health and happiness enjoyed by the friend or family named on the onions. Onions also provide romantic advice for the lovelorn. A woman trying to choose between lovers would carve out their names on separate onions. The one that sprout first would reveal the suitor most worthy of her affections. Answers to any question could be sought by inscribing yes and no on two separate onions and planting them to see which sprout first. There's a rhyme about onion used to predict the weather for the year, it goes like this: "Onion skins very thin, mild winter coming in. Onion skins very tough, coming winter very rough."



The following verse riddle concerns onions, cited by Yann Lovelock in his 'The Vegetable Book', 1973, which has a double meaning, hope you enjoy reading it.

*I am a wonderful thing, a joy to women...
I stand up high and steep over the bed;
Beneath I am shaggy. Sometimes comes nigh
A young maiden and handsome peasant's daughter,
A maiden proud, to lay hold on me,
She raises my redness, plunders my head,
Fixes on me fast, feels straightaway
What meeting me means when she thus approaches,
A curly haired woman. Wet is the eye.*