

of a combination of factors described in this paper. Colleges are in business to educate and train students. Much work is done in order to try to promote our industry's image but much more could be achieved with the help of the nursery industry itself.

ALLIUMS—MORE THAN JUST ONIONS

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When hunting allium material and slides, for a talk in America in 1982, no one seemed to have any interest in the genus, but suddenly alliums have become respectable, indeed, sought after. While their appeal may be less than that of gentians or primulas, there are plenty of good onions for the average garden.

When collecting plants of a genus the faint-hearted would do well to stick to *Belamcanda*, *Acorus*, or *Paradisea*, all two-specied genera. Contrariwise, there are around 600 alliums world-wide. Some would say that the only good ones appear on plates—not so.

Most alliums would love life in a Greek meadow, few relish rain-soaked Cumbria. *A. amabile*, (10cm) deep pink, dodging the slug packs, does well; *A. mairei* is a pale pink look-alike. *A. polyastrum* (50cm), purple, and *A. tuberosum* (Chinese chives, 40cm), white, are quite hardy and brighten the September border. *A. macranthum* (40cm), purple, flowers a little earlier.

A. splendens (20cm), lilac, is not spectacular but dries to a pleasant parchment shade. With long exserted stamens, *A. splendens* var. *kurilense* (10cm), is probably correctly named *A. thunbergii*. This small charmer makes a neat pot plant.

A. cyaneum (12cm) flowers in August, and is the toughest and most commonly grown of the bright blue alliums. Easily recognizable by its exserted stamens, it appears under many names. *A. sikkimense* flowers earlier and the stamens are included, as they are in *A. beesianum* (15cms), which flowers in September. This species is difficult to obtain, *A. cyaneum* being most frequently the masquerader under the label.

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A. cyathophorum var. *farreri* (17cm) which flowers in July and August is ubiquitous, turning up as *A. farreri*, *A. tibeticum* or *A. sp.* For all that, it is a good garden plant. All the alliums so far described as enduring rain originate in the Far East.

Most of the American onions are rather harder to grow. The white form of the July-flowering *A. acuminatum* (12cm) is attractive. *A. peninsulare* (12–15cm) keeps its purple/white colouring when dried. The lovely sugar pink *A. unifolium* (20cms) which flowers in June is excellent, dead or alive. The circumpolar *A. cernuum*, recognizable by its crooked neck, has a good deep purple form, *A. cernuum* var. *neomexicanum*.

British onions include *A. ampeloprasum*, which is a two metre tall, July flowering weirdo, and *A. triquetrum* (20cm) which bears white flowers in May.

From Europe come *A. sphaerocephalum*, purple-bronze (45cm) and *A. senescens* var. *glaucum*, lilac (15cm) with spirally twisted leaves, both August flowering. Another globe trotter, *A. carinatum* (*A. pulchellum*?) 'Album' (40cm), has a flowering 'fountain' head in August. Purple and pink variants are available. *A. flavum*, similarly shaped, varies in height from 6cms to 45cm.

The aristocrat of onions is *A. insubricum* (12cm), flowering rose pink in July, usually misnamed *A. narcissiflorum*.

From Greece comes *A. callimischon* var. *haemostictum* (10cm) flowering in September, so fragile, a pot may be the safest place. *A. olympicum*, pink, prostrate, July-flowering, has proved quite hardy in a raised bed in the Lake District.

Allium 'Foresgate' (30 to 45cm) is an attractive June flowering rose-lilac form of chives that has recently appeared in catalogues and is not bad for eating either! Garlic, so formidable to vampires, is rarely seen in flower, finding its way to the kitchen too promptly.

Middle Eastern onions include *A. paniculatum* (8 to 30cm) flowering in July and August in a variety of pastel shades and resembling *A. flavum*. *A. oreophilum* var. *ostrowskianum* appears in many bulb catalogues. *A. paradoxum* var. *normmale* (25cms), white, another aristocrat, resembles lily of the valley and blooms in April.

Even the kitchen onions can have charm. *A. fistulosum* (45cm) white, attracts the bees (How does the honey taste?). The pale yellow of *A. obliquum* (45cm) lightens the July border.

Identifying the Russian onions is a chore. *A. akaka* with broad fleshy leaves belongs in the Alpine house but *A. giganteum* (to 150cm) grows happily outdoors in northern England—or North America.

This small selection should prove that growing alliums is worth a gamble. Most are easily grown from seed. Cutting the seed heads early prevents dissemination, although beware any plant with bulbils in the head.