

Allium cepa var. *aggregatum*

[Synonyms : *Allium ascalonicum*]

SHALLOT is a bulbous perennial. A form of onion it has white flowers.

It is also known as *Ascalonia* (Spanish), *Bawang merah* (Malay), *Brambang abang* (Javanese), *Chalotas* (Portuguese), *Chalote* (Spanish), *Échalote* (French), Eschallot, French shallot, *Gandana* (Hindi, Punjabi), *Gundhun* (Bengali), Multiplier onion, *Oignon patate* (French), *Potatislök* (Swedish), Potato onion, *Rathu-lunu* (Singhalese), Red onions, *Ryvässipuli* (Finnish), *Scalogna* (Italian), *Schalotte* (German), *Sibuyas* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Sjalotten* (Dutch), *Skalotteløg* (Danish), *Sommerzwiebel* (German), Small onions, and Spanish garlic.

There are many varieties of shallot including grey and red-skinned.

Cepa is derived for some authorities from Celtic *cep* (head), is said by some to mean ‘headed’, and is the Latin name for onion (often spelled *caepa*). *Aggregatum* is derived from Latin *aggregati-* (crowded, close) meaning ‘clustered in a dense mass’ with reference to the bulbs.

The correct name for the shallot is *Allium ascalonicum* – and *ascalonicum* means ‘of or from the environs of an ancient Palestinian port (Ascalon or Ashkelon). However ‘shallot’ familiar today is often *Allium cepa* var. *aggregatum* and this has no connection with Ascalon.

Authorities argue about the lineage of the shallot but they do agree that it was unknown to the ancient cultures. Some authorities believe that it was being grown in France during the period of the Carolingian dynasty that ruled the Holy Roman Empire (800-911 AD). Others suggest that it was introduced to Europe by the Crusaders when they returned home from their battles in the 12th or 13th Centuries. Certainly the shallot was said to be familiar to Europeans by then and this would co-incide with the return of many of those soldiers.

Still quoted today in the English countryside but little practised is the tradition of planting shallots on 21st December (the shortest day) and harvesting them on 21st June (the longest day).

In some African countries if nowhere else local people believed that snakes have an aversion to onions (*Allium cepa*) and for this reason shallots were often grown or scattered near or around their homes.

For Malaysians evil spirits could be ousted by squeezing shallot juice into the sufferer’s eyes. Medicinally, some west African countries have used the bulb in local treatments to cure fever and as an antidote for poisons and snake bites. While in India the bulb has been used to treat earache. They have also been held to provide a remedy for sleeplessness.

POTATO ONION is a bulbous perennial.

It is also known as Egyptian onion, and Underground onion.

It was introduced to Britain from Egypt according to the 19th Century English botanist and horticulturist, John Lindley (1799-1865) in the early 1800s. (Apparently Lindley actually specialised in orchids.)