**ALLIUMS**

by Michael Halm

Alliums are those members of the large lily family including chives, garlic, leeks, onions and shallots. All of these related plants originated in the Mediterranean/Near East area in prehistory. There are dozens of varieties of onions. Scallions are immature onions harvested before the bulb has grown to half an inch. Pearl onions are those with bulbs up to about one inch.

It is important to select the correct variety for the best results in your cooking. Mild Bermuda or Italian red onions are best for salads. White Bunching is good for pickling. Red Spanish is good for deep frying.

Because of its ability to hold heat the heart of the onion was said to ease the pain of an earache. Its nutritional value includes vitamins B, C and G with calcium, nitrogen and vitamin A concentrated in the tip.

The sulfurous oils that are in the onion are the cause of its pungent odor. Tearing can be avoided during onion chopping if done under a running tap or, it is said, by holding a toothpick or bread crust between your teeth. The best thing for onion breath is a bit of parsley or clove.

The onion contains 87% water ans so, like the potato, can be baked. It also contains about 10% sugars and 1½% protein.

The leek is the national emblem of Wales having been used for identification of the Welsh when they fought the Saxons in the 7th Century. They are still worn to celebrate St. David's Day, March 22.

Being the milder allium the saying goes that if you do not like the smell of leeks, eat onions -- leeks won't bother you anymore. If onions bother you, eat garlic.

The roots of the leek should be left on until it is to be used as they help keep it fresh. The most famous recipe with leeks is the national soup of Scotland:

COCK-A-LEEKIE SOUP

Clean and trim a dozen leeks and cut into half inch pieces. Sauté in butter with one carrot and two celery stalks also cut small. Clean a chicken as for roasting, but cook whole in a kettle with veal stock and the veggies for about one and a half hours.

Among the many properties which have been attributed to garlic are its ability to ward off vampires and werewolves, the evil eye, the plague, to cure insect bites and respiratory problems. It has always been considered strong medicine.

The shallot, like garlic, is divided into two or more cloves. Most are now imported. Chives and scallions should be fresh. Onions are best stored at just above freezing in a dry ventilated place. Leeks are especially susceptible to wilting and spoilage. Don't let garlic brown in cooking -- it produces a very pungent odor.

The juice of leeks and onions who fondly sips

To kiss the fair maiden must close his lips.