

FOOD



iPad Extra
Watch a video with dicing tips and caramelizing techniques (and a bonus recipe) in our iPad edition. Available from the App Store.

KEY INGREDIENT

ONION

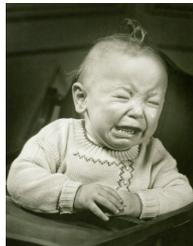
BY MARISA ROBERTSON-TEXTOR

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you stopped and looked, really looked, at an onion? That's what we thought. Try it now. Notice how sinuous and graceful it is—a card-carrying member of the lily family. Admire its demure moonlit glow, muse to Dutch Old Masters and French Impressionists alike. When you're ready, slice into its delicate parchment. Blink away the tears. Now look again. There they are, the concentric rings that form the DNA of practically every worthwhile meal you'll ever cook. Some types, candylite, are meant for eating out of hand, like an apple. Others, strong and harsh, require gentle sweating to collapse into an inevitable heap of rounded, translucent sweetness—perhaps the single greatest culinary metamorphosis in existence. No wonder this venerable creature was once called the truffle of the poor. ▶▶

KEY INGREDIENT

LORD OF THE RINGS

The ancient names for onion in Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin are unrelated, a sign that the vegetable has been independently cultivated in far-flung parts of the world since prehistoric times. (Its original wild ancestor, thought to have hailed from Central Asia, has long since vanished.) Columbus introduced the cultivated onion to the New World on his voyage to the West Indies in 1493.



NO MORE TEARS

That sting occurs when the onion's complex of sulfur compounds hits the air, releasing allicin, an eye irritant. To avoid weeping, peel onions under cold running water or chill first.



ROASTED ONIONS For a delicious, hassle-free side, heat oven to 425° and arrange 4 whole onions, skin on, in a baking dish. Roast until tender, about 1 hour, then halve and season with coarse salt, freshly ground black pepper, and fresh herbs such as thyme or chopped parsley. Drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil.

ANTISEPTEVIK

During World War II, Soviet doctors applied onions to wounds to treat infections.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

In the 1950s, onion growers, alarmed by low prices, persuaded Congress to ban futures trading in onions.

GLADIATORADE

Greek athletes used to prepare for the Olympics by eating pounds of onions and drinking onion juice.

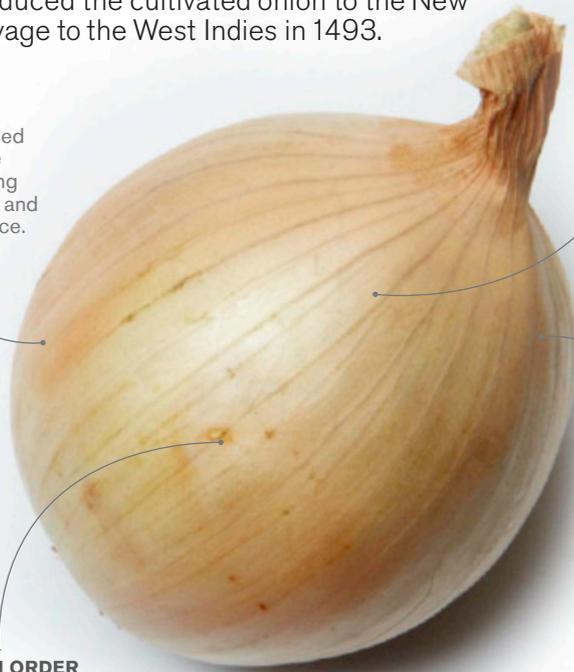
"KNOW YOUR ONIONS"

slang, Brit:

to be fully acquainted with a subject

THAT'S AN ORDER

Sent by Ulysses S. Grant to the War Department: "I will not move my army without onions."

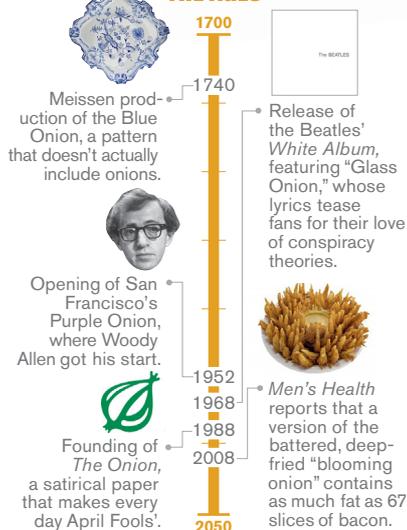


ONIONS ARE FOREVER

A symbol of eternity, the onion was a fixture in Egyptian tomb paintings and inscriptions. Bulbs were placed inside a corpse during mummification, with others wrapped in bandages as carry-ons for the journey to the afterlife.

21.4
POUNDS OF ONIONS
ARE EATEN EACH
YEAR PER AMERICAN.
SOURCE: USDA

ONIONS THROUGH THE AGES



ALL ABOUT ALLIUMS

There are hundreds of edible onions out there; here are four of our favorites.



VIDALIA

From Georgia (U.S.)

In the kitchen

Gentle and sweet, they shine when sautéed in a slurry of olive oil and herbs.



PEARL

From Everywhere

In the kitchen

They're just the right size for pickling whole or creaming into a classic side.



WHITE

From Canary Islands

In the kitchen

They're mild, they're versatile, and they're good raw or cooked.



CIPOLLINI

From Italy

In the kitchen

These flat-topped beauties are made for braising and slow-roasting.