

BETTER KNOW YOUR VEGETABLES:

This Week . . . Part 2 of unsung hero, Onion and its sister, Shallot

Source: Wikipedia.org; urbantext.com; www.apinchof.com

Not just a source of tears, bad breath and newspaper satire – they're healthy too! Onions, like garlic, are members of the Allium family. Both are similarly rich in sulfur-containing compounds responsible for their odor and for their significant health benefits. Evidence suggests that onions may be effective against the common cold, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other diseases.

Shallots

Shallots are daintier members of the same family. Their taste has been described as sweeter than the mildest onion; they're more digestible than the rest of the family and have less of an impact on breath. Shallots are similar in size to a head of garlic and often have two bulbs within their papery skin. This skin and the outer layer of each bulb are peeled away, leaving what appears to be a small onion. They cook quickly, maintaining a silky texture, and can be used in place of onions, especially if when served raw.

Storing onions

Lay mature onions in a single layer on newspaper in a warm, well ventilated place to cure for a few days. Leave undisturbed until the outer skin becomes papery and crispy dry. Select unbruised onions, rub off the stringy roots, and braid the tops. Hang in bunches or place in mesh bags and hang away from moisture. If stored in a dry cool place (50 to 60 degrees), they will keep for months.

Prune and Onion/Shallot Confit

Source: www.nadineabensur.com

This is a great and easy side that can be served with couscous and pumpkin for vegetarians, or with grilled lamb for carnivores.

500 g/1lb 2 oz small round shallots (or yellow onions), peeled

2 tbsp olive oil

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

4 garlic cloves

400 g/14 oz soft prunes, stones left in

A handful of whole almonds, blanched and skins slipped off

Heat the olive oil in a pan or deep frying pan. Add the peeled shallots and fry them until they are brown and golden. Season with a little salt and pepper and add the whole garlic cloves, then add the prunes and enough water to just cover. Simmer on quite a fierce heat, until it is all absorbed, adding water a little at a time, until the shallots become golden and caramelised all the way through but still maintain much of their shape, and the prunes are soft with some dissolving into the sauce. The whole thing should take about 20-25 minutes. A few minutes before the end, add the blanched almonds and heat.



SIDEBAR: Cookbooks for More Inspiration

Hardly exhaustive, these are just some starter ideas for veggie-friendly, healthy but authentic Indian cookbooks:

Healthy Indian Cooking by Shezad Husain. One of my favorites. She includes a lot of great substitutions in the more traditional recipes, making them lighter but still tasty.

Flavorful India: Treasured Recipes from a Gujarati Family by Priti Chitnis Gress. This is mostly vegetarian, with lots of little anecdotes about the author's family. The recipes are mostly from her mother, and her father drew the sketches scattered throughout the book.

Grains, Greens, and Grated Coconuts: Recipes and Remembrances of a Vegetarian Legacy by Ammani Ramachandran. This is a new recipe book and food memoir of growing up in Kerala. It comes highly recommended by a friend, and provides some great south Indian options.