

Leeks

Leeks are closely related to onions, garlic, shallots, and chives. They produce bundles of long, narrow, flat leaves with a round white stalk at the base. This is different than the bulbs you would see on an onion. Leeks have a similar look to green onions but are larger and the leaves take on a bluish tint. The easiest way to tell the difference between an onion and a leek is to look at the stems. Onions have a round hollow stem and a leek's stems are flat.

Planting

Leeks have a slow to moderate growth rate and should be planted in early spring. They can be planted in the fall in some areas. Be careful where you plant them as they have chemical compounds that are toxic to pets.

Pick a sunny spot that has rich, well-drained soil. Raised garden beds and containers are also great options for smaller spaces.

Leeks can be planted around the time of your area's last spring frost. Young plants can survive light frost, while mature plants can withstand heavier frosts. To get a jump on the growing season, start seeds indoors approximately 10 to 12 weeks prior to your projected last spring frost date. Plant seeds roughly one quarter inch deep and 6 to 8 inches apart. When planting seedlings, mound soil around the stem up to the first green leaf. Leeks can continue to grow and be harvested through the winter months in the Pacific Northwest.

Harvesting

Unlike their cousin, the onion, leeks do not die back when they are ready to harvest. They are ready once the stem width is larger than an inch and feels firm. If you leave them in the garden they will continue to grow bigger as the season progresses. Leeks can stay in the ground for extended periods of time allowing you more time to harvest. The thinner the stalk the more potent the leek will be. Want a milder flavor? Allow the stalk to become larger in size.

To harvest, remove the leeks from the soil by twisting and pulling or digging. In warmer climates, plants will continue growing and producing harvestable leeks throughout the winter.

Wash the leaves and remove any soil. Leeks can be blanched and frozen for up to a year.

Prior to freezing your leeks, wash, slice, and blanch for 1 minute in boiling water. After blanching, drain, drip dry, and toss into plastic freezer bags. Frozen leeks are great additions to soups, stews, and other dishes.

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