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How to Grow Leeks: The Complete Guide



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FREE GUIDE!

Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Leeks

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

Last Updated: October 3, 2024



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Perhaps the noblest *Allium*, which is both sweeter and milder than an onion and a space saver in the garden, is the humble leek. Learn to plant, grow, care for, and harvest leeks in your own garden so that you have a generous supply for winter comfort food and summer salads!

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About Leeks

We love leeks! This sweet cousin of the onion

winter or early spring and unbothered by frosts, hail, and storms.

Leeks are a member of the genus *Allium*, like [onions](#), [shallots](#), [garlic](#), [scallions](#), and [chives](#). Although they may look like an overgrown green onion, they are a different species, *Allium porrum*, sometimes also called *A. ampeloprasum*. Leeks have flat leaves and don't make a much of a bulb.

Leeks are hardy once established, and many varieties can be left in the garden even after your frost dates and harvested as needed all fall. Leeks can be harvested over a long period if you choose the right mix of varieties. Varieties described as early-season leeks will be ready in time for autumn, while mid- and late-season leeks can be harvested through the winter and into spring.

If you've never had leeks, they're more like mild onions that have a sweeter flavor than regular onions. In recipes, leeks may be substituted for onions and, unlike onions, can be chopped and frozen for use in the winter after you run out of your own onions.

What most people consider the edible portion of the leek is the white or pale green main stem, which is actually not a stalk but a bundle of leaves. However, the entire plant—minus the roots—is edible. While the white and light green parts are commonly cut up and used, even the tougher green tops (called the flag) are edible and make a great addition to your stocks and soups for flavoring.



Read Next

- [How to Grow Green Onions: The Complete Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Shallots: The Complete Guide](#)

PLANTING

Leeks like full sun, doing best with at least 8 hours a day, if they can get it. They need deep, fertile, well-draining soil with high organic matter levels. A [soil pH](#) of 6.0-7.0 is ideal.

When to Plant Leeks

- Leeks can be bought from a garden center or greenhouse as young plants or started from seed easily at home. They are cool weather tolerant and can be planted out before [your last frost](#).
- If starting from seed indoors, you'll want to get them sown about 8-10 weeks before your last frost date.
- If transplanting your own seedlings or purchased ones, harden them off for several days and then plant them out 1-3 weeks before your last frost, when temperatures reach 45°F (7°C) during the day. Leek seedlings can tolerate a light frost, and can be planted out several weeks earlier than most plants.

How to Plant Leeks

prices vary widely with variety and organic certification, you can purchase 250 leek seeds for as little as a five-dollar bill. Look out for varieties described as “rust resistant,” as this fungal disease can cause minor problems from summer onwards.

Leeks can be planted in the ground in your garden, in [raised beds](#), or even in deep containers. ([Read about the benefits of each method.](#))

To start leeks from seed:

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- Sow them in soil blocks or prepared trays of well-moistened seed starting mix.
- Plant the seeds about ¼ inch deep.
- If planting in cell trays, drop two seeds per

- Keep them moist but not soggy, and provide plenty of light once they sprout.

Once your leeks are ready to plant out, follow these steps:

- Leeks like organic matter. If needed, gently work several inches of compost into the planting bed.
- Leek seedlings should be planted deeply to encourage long stalks. They can be grown in two methods: trenching or hilling. Check this page from the University of Wisconsin Extension for more information on [how to plant leeks](#).
- For trenching, dig a trench 6 inches deep. Plant your leek seedlings in the bottom and water in. Don't fill in the trench yet. You'll do that later.
- Leave enough space between plants for good airflow.
- For hilling, plant your leeks as other plants, and water in. Later, you can hill them like potatoes.
- Mulch your leeks to keep the soil near the surface from drying out and reduce weeds.

Growing Leeks from Sowing to Harvest



GROWING



Whether you grew them from seed or bought transplants, caring for leeks is the same and is pretty straightforward.

- Leeks have shallow root systems and will need regular watering. Irrigation provided at the soil level creates fewer problems than overhead sprinkling. Drip irrigation is ideal for running under your mulch and

- About an inch per week is sufficient, however, monitor the soil. If the top 2-3 inches are dry, give them a drink. Leeks planted in sandy soil will need more water.
- As your leeks grow, either fill in the trench or hill the soil. Two to three times over the beginning of the season will be sufficient. The soil around the stem will provide a blanching effect, making the white portion longer and sweeter.
- Mulch around your leeks to keep weeds down and encourage healthy soil conditions.
- Take it easy with the cultivator. The shallow leek roots can be easily damaged by cultivation or hoeing. Use mulch and hand pulling to keep the weeds in check.

Visit Cornell University's Growing Guide for more [tips on growing leeks](#).

Types

- **'Tadorna'** is a vigorous grower with dark green-blue foliage that will overwinter in mild climates.
- **'King Richard'** is a large leek with shanks that may reach a foot long. It will tolerate fall temperatures down to 20 degrees with minor damage. An early-maturing leek at

- ‘**Dawn Giant**’ lives up to its name, with a 15-inch shank reaching 2 inches in diameter.

HARVESTING

Leeks will be perfectly happy to sit in your garden and do their thing. Unlike some other crops, which must be harvested all at once and stored, you can go snag half a dozen leeks whenever you need them from late summer until the ground freezes.

- If you live in warmer climates, usually USDA Zone 7 or above, you can likely keep them in the ground all winter. As long as the ground doesn't freeze, store your leeks in their garden bed.
- Leeks can be harvested early—a great way to thin them—or left to grow larger than an inch in diameter.
- Young leeks harvested at finger size will be more mild and tender and are great for eating fresh in salads or pestos. Larger leeks develop more flavor and texture.
- The tops won't die back like an onion, and in fact, in more temperate areas, leeks will display their biennial nature and bloom

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

- [Thrips](#)
- [Leek rust](#)
- [Leek moth](#)

WIT AND WISDOM

- Leeks have been cultivated for several thousand years, probably because they are tasty!
- Leeks are a national emblem of Wales. They are a symbol of the Welsh people, going back hundreds of years. The cap

- William Shakespeare's *Henry V* refers to wearing leeks as an ancient identification.

RECIPES

**CREAM OF LEEK AND VERMICELLI
SOUP**

VEGETABLES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture. [Read More from Andy Wilcox](#)

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COMMENTS

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Joanne Vegter (not verified) 6 months 2 weeks ago

This year and also last year most of my leeks put up a flowering stalk! I have never had this problem before; it makes processing the crop a real nuisance. Any idea why this is happening?

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[REPLY](#)

The Editors 6 months 2 weeks ago

Hi Joanne,

Leeks can bolt (send up a flower stalk) when they experience optimal growing temperatures followed by a period of cold weather, which is the opposite for many flowering plants. To avoid your leek plants from bolting, the timing of planting can be adjusted to make sure they are planted after daytime temperatures are consistently above 45°F. Another reason for bolting is too much fertilizer so it is best

One more thing to consider is if planting transplants, consider selecting ones that are smaller (thinner than a drinking straw) because the larger a leek plant grows, the more likely they are to produce flowers. In the future, if you see your leek plants starting to produce flower stalks, remove them as soon as possible because once they are allowed to grow and mature, it can change the flavor of the vegetable.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

Ann E. Dyer (not verified) 6 months 2 weeks ago

You need to mention that the deer also love leeks! it was a total surprise to me! Who would have thought?!

REPLY

Joe Bills 6 months 2 weeks ago

Thanks, Ann. This is an important reminder that even though leeks are often listed among “deer-resistant” plants, deer

may develop a taste for foods that others typically dislike. This handy article from the University of New Hampshire Extension service offers good advice on shielding your gardens from deer and other four-legged snackers:

<https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2018/12/keep-deer-out-your-garden-winter>

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