

Leeks



Growing-leeks

Leeks or *allium ampeloprasum* is a hardy plant which can grow in cold climates as well as warm climates. Even though the word *allium* is related to the onion family, unlike their cousins leeks do not produce bulbs or cloves. Instead, leeks develop an edible round stem which can be 6 to 10cm long and white in colour. Gradually this opens with a fan like flat leaves. Raw leeks have mild onion flavour and crunchy texture which becomes silky and sweet when cooked. Leek is the sweetest member in the onion family.

Leeks, like many other herbs, believe to be a native to Mediterranean lands especially from Israel to India and grown for more than 3000 years in Europe and Asia. Some historical reports indicate that Emperor Nero (37-68 AD) ate large quantities of leeks cooked in oil to improve his singing voice hence gaining the nickname Porophagus (leek eater).

Although this is one of the unappreciated vegetable, Leeks has many health benefits as a food. It is a good source of fibre and contains folic acid, calcium, potassium and vitamin C. Green tops of the leeks have beta carotene which makes vitamin A in your body. Leek is easier to digest than onion and garlic and have antiseptic, diuretic and anti-arthritis properties. As a member of the *Allium* family, sulphur compounds found in the leeks have blood pressure lowering properties and prevent platelets from clumping and protect you from heart disease.

Growing hints

Leeks can grow all year around in cooler climates. If you water them well and apply thick layer of mulch, it can grow under warmer and drier conditions. For winter crops, leeks need to plant in late February to April for them to establish before weather become too cold. For summer crops, plant them in August to early September.

This can grow from seedlings or seed can be sown directly into the soil. If grow from seeds directly, it is necessary to thin them same as carrots.

Soil Preparation

For planting, choose a sunny position in the garden with well-drained soil. Dig the soil at least 10cm deep and mix with good compost and little sand before planting. This helps the roots to go deeper and plants to grow stronger. You can use rotted leaves or any other organic matters to nourish your garden bed. Make trenches about 20cm or 6-8 inches deep and plant the seedlings about 15cm or 6 inches apart. Keep soil moist and loose for healthy growth. Build the soil around each plant when it is growing to have longer and tender whiter part of the leeks. If you are growing leeks for winter consumption, cover the whole bed with thick layer of mulch to keep the soil warm during the winter months.

Leeks can be grown in heavy clay soil but improve it with sand and mulch for drainage.

This needs fertiliser to have a healthy growth, therefore apply some liquid fertiliser once in two weeks at the early stage.

Leeks can be harvested 15-18 weeks after planting. It can be pulled from ground or cut cleanly about 1 cm above the ground. If you cut the plant when harvesting, you'll see it grow again.

Leeks companions

Onion garlic, chive, shallot are in the same family as leeks and can grow together. Carrot is also a good companion for leeks. Any legumes such as beans, peas shouldn't be grown together with leeks.

Leeks cooking and storing

Leeks cannot freeze very well in raw form. In the winter, leave leeks in the ground with good cover of mulch and pull them as you need. Fresh leeks can be kept in the refrigerator for about a week.

When you select leeks for cooking, select the ones with firm straight dark green leaves and white section about 1-1½ inch diameter in size. Large, oversize leeks are very often more fibrous and less flavoursome than small ones. With much sweeter and delicate flavour than onion and garlic, leeks can add into any combination of food without overpowering the desired flavours. Leeks in cooking, can poach, fry, boil or bake.

Leeks Recipes

Leeks fried with chilli

Ingredients:

- 4 medium size leeks
- 2 tbsp. oil
- 1/2 tsp. turmeric
- 1 tsp. crushed chilli
- 1 tsp. musted seeds
- 2 tbsp. Maldive fish or 2-3 anchovies (optional)
- 1 tsp. salt

Method:

1. Wash leeks well to remove any dirt. Discard any tough or withered leaves. Slice the leeks very thinly including the green part.
2. Heat oil in a frying pan. Add musted seeds and the leeks. Cook for about 2 minutes
3. Add turmeric, chilli and maldive fish and salt. If you use anchovies check for saltiness before adding more salt)
4. Uncover and cook until all mixed well. This goes very well with rice.

Leeks and Potato soup

Ingredients:

- 2-3 leeks white part only washed and thinly sliced
- 3 medium size potatoes cut into small cubes
- 1 tbsp. oil
- 1 onion chopped
- 2-3 garlic clove crushed
- 3 cups water or any stock
- ½ cup thickened cream
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Chopped chives or parsley for garnishing

Method:

1. Heat oil in a big saucepan and cook onion and garlic until they softened. Add leeks and potatoes and mix well.
2. Add the stock and bring to boil. Then reduce heat and gently cook for about 15-20 minutes until all soft. Let it to cool.
3. Puree the mixture using blender.
4. Pour the mixture back into the saucepan and add cream over medium heat. Cook stirring for about 5 minutes until the soup is hot.
5. Season with salt and pepper and garnish as you wish and serve.

References:

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Swarna Upadasa



Fresh leeks



Leeks fried