

Home Gardening Series

Leeks

Craig R. Andersen
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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained loam
Fertility – medium to rich
pH – 5.5 to 7.0
Temperature – cool
Moisture – moist

Culture

Planting – direct seed in fall or
transplant late winter
Spacing – 4-6 x 12-24 inches
Hardiness – hardy biennial
Fertilizer – heavy feeder

Leeks – *Allium ampeloprasum*

Leeks are hardy, mild-flavored vegetables of the onion family that have been cultivated for centuries but were never found wild. Leek plants resemble large onion plants with flat leaves, but they are made up of sheaths of basal leaves rather than bulbs. Leeks may be eaten raw or cooked, but they are used primarily for flavoring soups and stews in place of onions.

Cultural Practices

Planting Time

Plant 10 to 15 seeds per foot of row directly in the garden in the fall. Thin the seedlings to 4 inches apart. Leeks may also be started in hotbeds or in the house during January in the same manner as onion transplants.



Care

Leeks will grow in any garden that will produce good onions. When the plants begin strong growth in the spring, cultivate and draw soil toward the plant to blanch the edible portion. Blanching makes the leeks longer and whiter at harvest. Leeks are slow growers, requiring 120 days or more to reach 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Do not bank the soil around the plants for blanching until they are at least the size of a pencil. Early banking while they are small will cause the plant to rot and die.

Harvesting

Leeks may be harvested for use throughout the spring. To harvest, loosen the soil with a spading fork and pull out the plant. Cut off the roots and all but 2 inches of the green leaves. Leeks may be dug before hard freezes and stored under refrigeration. The plant may also be mulched heavily with fresh straw for harvest whenever the ground is not frozen. Spring harvest is usually completed by late April and early May, before the leeks begin second growth and send up a seedstalk.

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Cultivars

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Seed Per 100 Feet of Row	Remarks
Leeks	Titan	70	1 ounce	Extra long, early type, vigorous growth, dark green leaves with white stems, summer culture.
	Arkansas	105	1 ounce	Dark blue-green foliage, tolerance to subfreezing temperatures.
	American Flag	130	1 ounce	Large, thick shanks, blanching to a clear white, leaves blue-green, very hardy and cold resistant, standard local market and home garden cultivar.
	Dawn Giant	98	1 ounce	Easy to grow, large – 5 inches long and 2 inches across.
	King Richard	120	1 ounce	Tall and slender with fine texture. Great for baby leeks.

Frequently Asked Question

Q. How are leeks different from onions and garlic?

- A. The leek is a member of the onion family, but it is milder than either onions or garlic. Unlike onion or garlic, leeks do not form bulbs or produce

cloves but develop an edible, 6- to 10-inch long, round stem as much as 2 inches in diameter. Leeks have leaves very similar to garlic. They are flat rather than round and hollow like onion leaves. Elephant garlic is a member of the leek family.

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