

## How to grow leeks

### Leeks (*Allium porrum*)

Family: Alliaceae (Onion)  
 Hardiness: Hardy  
 Ease of growing: Medium  
 Nutrient needs: Medium  
 Water needs: High  
 Common propagation: Transplants

### Seed facts

Germination temperatures: 40°F to 95°F  
 Germination time 14 to 21 days  
 Viability: 1 to 5 years

### Transplants

Weeks to grow transplants: 12 to 16  
 Start: February to March  
 Plant out: May

### Planning facts

Typical spacing: 4" to 6" on 24" rows  
 Plants per square foot: 4  
 Days to harvest: 75 to 120 from transplants

### General

Leeks are not common in most gardens. This onion relative is grown for its thick, white stems that possess a sweet and subtle onion flavor. Leeks are extremely hardy and perform well in Michigan. They will grow in most well drained soils as long as they receive a dependable supply of moisture.

### Variety selection

Varieties vary in their color, winter hardiness and days to maturity. Tadorna is a popular high-yielding variety with a long white shank, blue-green color and good winter hardiness.

### Preparation and planting

Leeks take a long time to grow, so transplants are often started beginning as early as February, when seedlings that are at least 8 inches tall and pencil-thick will do best.

You can start transplants in a trench 6 to 8 inches deep. As the plants grow, fill the trench with no more than 1 inch of soil at a time. This will yield the desired long, white stems. If the filling is done too fast, the stems may rot. The other growing option is to plant the seedlings like onion transplants and hill up around the stems as they mature. Control weeds around young plants – they are slow to establish and cannot compete against vigorous weeds, especially if the weather is hot.

### Major pests

**Insects:** Onion thrips, onion maggot, bulb mite.

**Diseases:** Basal rot, white rot, downy mildew, botrytis rot.

### Harvest and storage

Harvest leeks whenever they reach a usable size, usually 1 inch in diameter or larger. At full maturity, they may reach 2 inches in diameter. Pull by hand or dig them out. Before freezing sets in, remove leeks from the garden and store under cool (32°F to 40°F) and moist conditions, packed upright in boxes of moist peat or sand and stored in a basement, or mulch them heavily for storage over the winter in the garden. Leeks are biennials, so plants left in the garden the next spring will develop flowers and seed heads, at which point the flavor changes and they become undesirable to eat.

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