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Leeks are ready to harvest when they get about half an inch in diameter.

A leek solution



Bruce Gravens
Master Gardener

Question: When should I seed leeks? I see some sources saying early February while others say April. Which is right?

ANSWER: Both are right! Leeks are a great allium to grow in the Umpqua Valley and can be cooked in their own right as well as be used as an onion substitute. They are ready to harvest when your storage onions start to go bad and continue until your spring onions are ready to harvest. They are well-suited to our warm summers and cool wet autumn and winters.

You can seed autumn leeks in a heated greenhouse or indoors in early February, planting them out in May, and starting the harvest in September.

Winter leeks can be seeded in the garden in a small seeding plot in early April, transplanted in late July, and you can start harvesting in November.

In all but the harshest of winters both of these leek plantings will stand in the garden all winter until you are ready to eat them. In the following summer they bolt and go to waste. Leeks can provide you with fresh produce from September until late spring the



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Leeks are a good source of vitamins A, C and K, contain such minerals as iron and manganese and is a good source of dietary fiber.

following year.

What is the difference between autumn and winter leeks? As the name implies, cold hardiness is the key. The seed suppliers do not normally label leeks as autumn vs. winter leeks. Winter leeks will have longer days to maturity and will mention cold hardiness or over-wintering in the description. The autumn leeks will have shorter days to maturity and will mention early harvest in the description.

I seed my leeks in my greenhouse for both autumn and winter leeks. My garden is not dry enough to work in April. I mix a



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If starting your leeks indoors, mix slow-release fertilizer into saturated potting mix in 4 inch pot before adding about 36 seeds on top of the mix before covering with a thin layer of vermiculite.

bit of slow-release fertilizer into the potting mix as leeks are heavy feeders and you want to encourage strong growth in very crowded conditions.

In a 4 inch pot, I put around 36 seeds on top

of saturated potting mix and cover them with a thin layer of vermiculite. I press down on the vermiculite to insure I get good seed to soil contact. Place the seed pots in a bright place where the

soil will stay at around 70 degrees F. The leeks should emerge in a couple weeks. Keep the soil moist and well-fertilized, as you try to grow tall leggy leeks.

When you are ready to transplant, make a trench in well-fertilized soil, deep enough that you can plant your leeks down to where the first leaf breaks on the stem. I plant my leeks on 3 inch centers with the idea that I will start harvesting them when they get to about 1/2 inch diameter.

By the time the leeks get really big, the ones still in the ground will be spaced 6 inches apart, if

you end up harvesting every other leek.

Seeding in the garden will produce the largest and strongest leek transplants. To seed your winter leeks in the garden, you need to get a 3 by 3 foot garden plot dry enough in early April to work. You do not want to work wet soil as it will easily become compacted.

I am thinking about setting up a small rain shelter that will keep the rain off the soil and let the sunlight in to dry out and warm the soil.

In the dry soil, mix in a bit of compost and fertilizer to a depth of at least 6 inches and smooth out the surface. Lay down 2-3 inches of potting soil and rake it a little bit to mix it into the garden soil slightly. Make five 1/2 inch deep furrows about 6 inches apart. Place seeds in the furrows at a rate of about 10 seeds per inch. Cover the furrows and gently press down on the seeds to get good seed to soil contact. Keep weeded, watered and fertilized until you are ready to transplant.

Warning: growing over-wintering leeks is a gateway drug into winter gardening! You may find yourself growing over-wintering kale, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, onions... Stay grounded!

Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.