

✧ Renee's Garden ✧

Leek Growing Guide: Planting • Growing • Harvesting

WHEN YOUR LEEK PLANTS ARRIVE

- ✧ Remove leek plants from the shipping box immediately. While they may appear dry, they're simply dormant.
- ✧ **DO NOT** put the plants in soil or water before planting. Keep in a well-ventilated, cool area until you can plant them.
- ✧ Plant your leeks within a week of arrival if possible - they can be kept for up to several weeks if necessary.

Soil Preparation and Planting

Leeks require full sun, good soil drainage and soil rich in nitrogen. Choose a location that gets plenty of direct sun and where your leeks will not be shaded by other crops. Leeks grow best on raised beds or raised rows at least 4" high and 20" wide. First, pull all weeds and work the soil, so is loose and crumbly. Work in compost or well-aged manure to improve aeration, moisture retention and drainage and then amend the soil with a good source of granular, high nitrogen organic fertilizer, according to the suggested rate on the box or bag. Cut a deep 6- to 8-inch-deep furrow in the soil with a shovel or trowel. Drop in leek plant 6 inches apart. Fill in the soil, covering plants so just one or 2 inches of the plant are still above the soil line. Firm soil around the plant and water in well. Long growing leeks are heavy feeders. As plants grow and begin to develop, plan to feed them at least once a month with a high nitrogen liquid fertilizer such as fish emulsion. Be sure to apply all fertilizers according to suggested rates.

Watering and Weeding

Water your leek plants regularly throughout their growth cycle. A good way to tell if watering is necessary is to put your finger in the soil near the plants. If the soil is dry below your first finger joint, it's time to water. Weed control is especially important early in the growing season to prevent

competition for nutrients. Mulch plants with a light layer of organic material like straw or wood chips to help control weeds and preserve moisture. Drip irrigation is a good way to stay on top of water needs and helps discourage foliar diseases.

Harvesting

Harvest the leeks as slim babies to steam whole or quickly grill on the barbecue. You can encourage long white shanks on your leeks by piling loose dirt around the shafts as they grow. Let most leeks mature to full size and in 90 to 105 days. If well cared for and fed, your leeks will grow about 12 to 14 inches tall with mature white stalks up to 1 inch thick. Harvest your full-grown leeks by digging them carefully with a garden fork. Mature leeks will store well in the ground during the winter months, and they also will keep well in the vegetable crisper of your refrigerator. Use in cooking like sweet onions, or as a tasty vegetable side dish. Leeks are wonderful in soups!

