



GROWING LEEKS

A HISTORY: *Allium ampeloprasum*: Leek cultivation dates back hundreds of years to southern Europe. They are often associated with early Christian sites and were cultivated by the monks as a substitute for garlic. An early form of leeks was first reported grown in England in 1650. Today the leek serves as an excellent substitute for onions and can be grown in protected gardens well into the fall.

PLANTING: Leeks are a cool-season biennial grown as an annual for their thickened leaf bases. Leeks, like onions, can be direct sown into a rich, well-drained garden soil after the danger of hard frost has passed, plant seeds in rows 18 inches apart at a depth of 1/2-3/4 inch and 1-2 inches apart. Thin to 4-5 inches apart. In areas where the growing season is shorter, seeds can be started indoors and transplanted out after the danger of hard frost has passed. When using transplants, plant in the bottom of a 5 inch deep trench and fill in around the base as the plants grow. This soil covering blanches the bottom few inches of the stalk. Fall blanching can also be accomplished by piling straw around the base of the plants.

HARVEST: Dig anytime the leeks are 1/2 inch in diameter or larger. Can be used raw or cooked. Insects and pests are very seldom a problem for leeks, and they are extremely disease resistant.

