

## **For the Love of Leeks**

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It is time to start seeds for a hearty crop of leeks. Although I like to start them in February, seeds can be started any time until April. Earlier plantings grow to full size by fall. Later seeded plants will be smaller but they continue to fill out over the winter and even the following spring.

Some varieties are hardier than others so check seed descriptions to choose varieties for summer, fall or winter harvest. My favourite large, hardy leek is 'Unique', but it isn't always available; other island gardeners have had success with 'Durabel' and 'Siegried Frost'. You can also buy seedlings at the garden centres.

Leeks grow beautifully in our climate and are easy to grow. Don't go to the trouble of transplanting seedlings into trenches for blanching. I find that leeks grow just as tall, with long white stems, when grown like onions. They are also cleaner since soil doesn't get between the leaf sheaths.

In rich soil garden soil, leeks can be planted closely because they have short, dense roots. They appreciate watering, but will tolerate drier conditions—just slower growing. You can harvest them any time, starting as soon as they are big enough to be worth the effort. The hardy varieties hold well all winter, poking through snow and resistant to frost. If they freeze solid in a cold snap, just wait until it warms enough to allow the plants to thaw out before you harvest.