

LEEKS

SEASON: September through December.

GROWING: Leeks are a real nuisance to grow. Seedlings the size of a blade of grass, started in the winter, are transplanted into the field by hand. The valued long, white stalks come from gradually hilling soil around it as it grows, to deprive it of light and thus of chlorophyll. It takes about 6 months for a leek to be ready to pick. The higher a farmer has hilled the leek, the longer the white part will be.

WHAT TO EXPECT: A mellow, sweet oniony flavor, in a form that just melts into sauces. It goes especially well with butter, cheese, and eggs.

VITAMINS AND MINERALS: A good source of manganese, vitamin C and B6, iron, and folate..

STORAGE: Wrapped in plastic in the fridge, they'll keep a week to 10 days.

WHY BUY IT LOCALLY? Because you'll feel good about it, which will make mealtime doubly rewarding..



Cooking with Leeks

PREPARATION

* Trim the thick green tops off - I do this one leaf at a time, starting with the outside layer and working my way in and upward, layer by layer, so I don't waste any of the stalk. There is a kind of ridge on the leaves at the point when they flare out from stalk; cut there.

* Washing is the trickiest part of leek prep, because each paper-thin layer can trap dirt under it when it's growing. Lay each trimmed leek on cutting board and cut from where the color begins to go from white to green, up to the tip-top. Rotate $\frac{1}{4}$ turn, and repeat, making a brush. Whisk the leek in a large pot of water to shake out all soil.

BASIC PREPARATION

* Often plays backup singer. As an ingredient, it's usually sliced thinly, across the stalk, before cooking low in butter until meltingly tender.

SERVING IDEAS

* Potato-leek soup: Place prepped leeks and an equal weight of thinly ($\frac{1}{8}$ ") sliced potatoes in a pot, with enough water to cover them.

Simmer until potatoes are tender. Season, and stir in a dab of butter.

* Put 3-4 cups of cubed butternut squash in a saucepan with 1-2 leeks, thinly sliced into rings, and 1 cup water. Bring to simmer, and drop in 4 T butter, 1 T at a time, waiting until one is melted before adding the next. Cook until squash is tender, about 5 minutes, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Lovely with fish.

* Add butter-softened leeks to scrambled eggs, omelets, or quiche, yum

AN ACTUAL RECIPE - Leek toasts

1 lb leeks, prepped 2 T. butter a pinch of nutmeg salt, pepper

1 cup crème fraiche, or $\frac{1}{2}$ c. sour cream Nice crusty bread.

* Melt butter in a skillet over low heat, and add leeks and 1 T water. Cover and let cook slowly for about 20 minutes, until leeks are very soft. Uncover and add the cream. Raise heat a little, to maintain a simmer, and cook until cream is melted in and absorbed (you don't want a watery liquid in the bottom of the pan). Season with nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Slice and toast bread, and serve topped with a slathering of leek cream.

Thank you for shopping Providence area markets!