

Health Benefits of Leeks



Leeks are one of the lesser-known members of the allium family, which includes onions, garlic, shallots, chives and scallions (green onions). Leeks look similar to green onions although much larger, up to a foot long and 1-2 inches in diameter. They have a mild, sweet onion flavor.

WHAT MAKES LEEKS GREAT?

Nutrition

Leeks have many of the same healthful nutrients as other allium vegetables, although research on their health benefits is limited. They are low in calories (54 for 1 cup raw or 1/2 cup cooked) with no fat and no cholesterol.

Vitamins

Leeks are an excellent source of antioxidants like vitamins C, K and beta-carotene that have anti-inflammatory and anti-aging benefits. Carotenoids include zeaxanthin and lutein which protect the eyes, reducing risk of cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. Vitamin K helps to maintain healthy bones and reduce risk of osteoporosis.

Leeks are healthy for your heart and contribute to reduced risk of stroke. They are good source of folate and B6, which work to keep homocysteine levels low, preventing artery damage and reducing formation of blood clots. Kaempferol helps the body to produce nitric oxide, a gas that triggers arteries to relax and widen, lowering blood pressure and improving blood circulation. Other B vitamins in leeks include thiamin (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3) and smaller amounts of pantothenic acid.

Like other allium vegetables, leeks have sulfur-containing compounds which are associated with reduced risk of cancer, particularly breast and colorectal cancers. Like all vegetables, leeks contain dietary fiber, which feeds your healthy gut microbiome and contributes to boosting immunity.

Minerals

Leeks contain iron for maintaining red blood cells that carry oxygen to tissues, and manganese, important for regulating nerve function. Leeks also contain potassium while also being low in sodium, which helps to lower blood pressure.

Most of the nutrients in leeks are concentrated in the bulb and lower leaf section, with the exception of folate and B6 which are found throughout the greens and bulb.

BUYING AND USING LEEKS

When choosing leeks, look for dark green leaves and white bulbs. Store unwashed in the refrigerator until ready for use, 2-3 days. When preparing, remove outer green leaves and cut off root fibers (if present). Then wash by fanning out the leaves or slicing lengthwise, and rinsing under running water. Slice for your recipe and let rest 5 minutes. Like other allium vegetable, this helps retain some of the healthful nutrients.



A quick sauté or wilting of leeks also retains nutrients. Try steaming with a small amount of broth or water about 4-6 minutes until soft. Leeks can be enjoyed as an ingredient in soups, stews or casseroles, or enjoyed as a side dish. Garnish leeks with fresh lemon juice and thyme.

The nutrients in leeks that help the body to produce nitric oxide are best consumed raw. Raw leeks are a delicious addition to salads or dips, mixed with pasta or tossed in with other vegetables. They are milder in flavor than onions and will not overpower delicate dishes like mashed potatoes.



Oregon State
University

stephanie.polizzi@oregonstate.edu
631 Alder Street, Myrtle Point, OR 97458
541-572-5263 ext 25291
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/coos>

Potato Leek Soup

Lovingitvegan.com

Ingredients:

1 onion, chopped	1 tsp dried rosemary
1 tsp crushed garlic	1/2 tsp coriander
1 Tbsp olive oil	2 bay leaves
4 large leeks, chopped	Sea salt and pepper to taste
6 medium potatoes, chopped	
4 cups vegetable stock/broth	
1 14-oz can coconut cream	
Fresh chives or leeks, chopped, as garnish	

Directions:

1. Add chopped onion and leeks to pot with garlic and olive oil and sauté until softened. Add dried spices and sauté 1-2 minutes more.
2. Add in chopped potatoes, bay leaves and stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until potatoes are soft, about 12-15 minutes.
3. Remove from heat and remove bay leaves. Add in coconut cream.
4. Use an immersion blender to blend soup, or transfer 1/4 of the soup to blender, blending all the soup in stages.
5. Return blended soup to pot or serving bowl and add salt and pepper to taste. Serve with fresh chopped chives or leeks.

Mujadara

A medley of onions, rice and lentils
Holycowvegan.net

Ingredients:

2 leeks, sliced, chopped	1 tsp cumin
1 cup lentils	1 tsp allspice
3/4 cup basmati or other long-grain rice	5 cloved garlic, minced
1 Tbsp olive oil	1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
4 cups leafy greens (spinach, kale, etc)	2 bay leaves
4 cups water	1 tsp cinnamon
	Salt to taste

Directions:

1. Place lentils in large pot and add enough water to cover by one inch. Bring to boil, cover and reduce heat. Cook 7 minutes. Drain but reserve water.
2. Heat oil in same pot. Add leeks and sauté over medium high heat until leeks start to caramelize. Remove half the leeks and set aside.
3. To remaining leeks in pot, add garlic and bay leaves. Stir to coat with oil then add rice. Continue to sauté until rice turns opaque.
4. Add drained lentils and cinnamon. Then add 4 cups water and bring to boil.
5. Lower heat to low and add lid. Steam 15 minutes.
6. Open pot and arrange greens across the top in an even layer. Replace cover and cook 5 more minutes.
7. Remove from heat and let stand, covered for 10 minutes.
8. Garnish with reserved leeks and serve. Salt to taste.

Leek & Cashew Appetizer

onegreenplanet.org

Ingredients:

2 leeks, rinsed, sliced
1-2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup raw cashews
2 tsp dried oregano
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1/2 tsp sea salt
1 Tbsp olive oil

Directions:

1. Warm up a pan over medium heat and sweat the garlic.
2. Add 1 cup boiling water and cover. Lower heat to low and cook 20 minutes.
3. Add spices and remove from heat.
4. In the meantime, roast raw cashews in dry pan until they begin to release aroma, about 3-5 minutes, stirring continuously, or in the oven at 350° about 12 minutes.
5. Put roasted cashews in food processor or high-speed blender and grind to small pieces. Add leek mixture and blend until smooth. Salt to taste.
6. Enjoy as a dip for cut vegetables, or as a spread for sandwiches.

REFERENCES

<https://nutritiondata.self.com/>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4366009/>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5053314/>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5986475/>