

Green Onions and Leeks

Many experienced cooks believe the onion is the most important ingredient to have on hand because of the diverse range of flavors--from sweet or mild to pungent and sharp. Although the onion family includes many different varieties let's narrow our focus today to ones generally thought of as spring choices- green onions and leeks.

Leeks and green onions look similar--they both have bulbous-like ends, fringed roots, and long leaves. Leeks are larger than green onions, with darker leaves. Green onions, also called scallions or spring onions, have a mild flavor. They are often referred to as fresh onions, unlike the varieties harvested later in the year called storage onions. They are easily recognized by their long green edible stalks and small white bases that have not yet developed into bulbs. At the grocery store they are found in bundles of eight to ten. Green onions are also easily grown at home. Green onions can be eaten raw or cooked. Some favorite cooking methods are sautéing, grilling or adding to stir-fries. Look for crisp green tops and white bottoms. In general, the more slender bottoms will have a sweeter taste.

Leeks have broad, flat leaves that are tightly wrapped around each other. They are found in markets year round with a peak during fall to early spring. Select leeks with clean white bottoms, straight ends, and green, crisp tops. The smaller the leek, the more tender it will be. Leeks and green onions should be used soon after purchasing. If you must store them, refrigerate them for up to a week in a plastic bag to help hold the moisture.

Before using them, rinse green onions thoroughly to dislodge any dirt between the leaves. Trim off the tip of the roots and any wilted green leaves. Chop or slice the onion, white base and green tops, and add to almost any recipe for flavor and added color.

Clean leeks by removing discolored leaves and trimming off green tops and root tips. Cut the leek lengthwise, spread the leaves and rinse them thoroughly. Placing the fanned out leaves in a bowl of water and gently moving the leaves will loosen any remaining dirt.

Leeks make excellent side dishes and appetizers but can also be added to many entrees including soups, stews, quiches, and salads.

Here is a quick and easy way to grill green onions. Place six to eight onions, washed and trimmed, on a sheet of aluminum foil. Squeeze the juice of half a lime over onions. Sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon of dried thyme, salt and pepper to taste. Seal foil around onions. Place on the grill, on the side away from direct heat or over low coals. Grill for 30 minutes. Serve with other grilled foods.

Perk up your spring menus with these recipes.

Corn and Green Chili Salad

2 cups frozen and thawed corn	1 Tablespoon lime juice
1 can (10 oz) diced tomatoes with green chilies	1/3 cup sliced green onions
1/2 Tablespoon vegetable oil	2 Tablespoons fresh chopped cilantro

Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl.

Yield: 4 servings, 3/4 cup each Nutrition Information per serving: 120 calories, 2.5 g total fat, 0 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 260 mg sodium, 25g total carbohydrate, 4g dietary fiber.

Italian Pasta Salad

4 cups pasta, cooked	1/4 cup sliced green onions
2 cups blanched broccoli pieces	1/2 to 3/4 cup Italian salad dressing, light or reduced fat
1 cup cooked carrot slices	
1/2 cup red pepper strips	

Mix all ingredients together and refrigerate for about 30 minutes before serving.

Yield: 8 servings Nutrition Information per serving: 150 calories, 2.5g total fat, 0g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 210mg sodium, 27g total carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber.

Layered Black Bean Dip

1 can (15 oz) black beans, drained and rinsed	1/2 cup salsa, thick and chunky
1/4 teaspoon onion powder	1/2 cup light sour cream
1/4 teaspoon dried oregano	1/4 cup chopped green onions
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder	2 ounces grated reduced-fat cheddar cheese
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper	

Mash beans and mix with onion powder, dried oregano, garlic powder and cayenne pepper. Spread on a serving dish. Top with salsa, sour cream, green onions and grated cheese. Note: For a more hearty salad, add strips of cooked ham, a can of cooked red beans or sprinkle with grated cheese. (not included in nutrition information)

Yield: 16 servings Nutrition Information per 2 tablespoon serving: 40 calories, 1.5g total fat, 1g saturated fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 150mg sodium, 4g total carbohydrate, 1g dietary fiber.

Confetti Grain Salad

1 1/2 cups brown rice, uncooked	1/2 teaspoon salt
3 cups water	black pepper to taste
juice of 2 lemons	1/4 cup olive or canola oil
3 green onions, sliced	1 1/2 cups of your favorite vegetables, cut into small pieces
1/4 cup minced parsley	

Wash rice and put into a 2-quart pot with water. Bring to boil, then lower heat to simmer, and cook uncovered until all the water is absorbed (approximately 45 minutes.) Pour into medium sized bowl and cool. Pour lemon juice over rice and stir. When rice is cooled to lukewarm, add vegetables, salt, pepper, and oil. Stir and chill at least 1 hour. This dish also can be served warm.

Yield: 6 servings Nutrition Information per 3/4 cup serving: 300 calories, 11g total fat, 1.5 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 230mg sodium, 47g total carbohydrate, 4g dietary fiber.

Orange-Almond Salad

4 cups mixed greens or lettuce	Dressing:
1 orange, peeled and sectioned	2-1/2 tablespoons cider vinegar
1/4 cup thinly sliced celery	1-1/2 tablespoons sugar or granular sugar substitute
1/4 cup sliced green onion	1 tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons toasted sliced almonds	1/2 clove garlic, minced

Combine greens, orange sections, celery, and green onions in a large bowl. In a small mixing bowl, combine vinegar, sugar, and oil; whisk until well blended and drizzle over greens. To serve, place greens on a serving plate and garnish with a sprinkle of toasted almonds. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings Nutrition Information per 1 cup serving: 90 calories, 6g total fat, 0.5g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 95 mg sodium, 9g total carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber.

Zucchini, Carrots, and Basil

1 1/2 teaspoons olive oil	1/2 clove garlic, minced
2 carrots, sliced	Dash of salt and pepper
2 zucchini, sliced	1 teaspoon lemon juice
1/4 cup sliced green onions	1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the carrots; sauté for 3 to 5 minutes. Add the zucchini, green onions, and garlic and continue cooking for an additional 3 to 5 minutes or until vegetables are tender-crisp. Add salt, pepper, lemon juice, and basil. Toss to coat and serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings Nutrition Information per 1/2 cup serving: 50 calories, 2.0g total fat, 0.5g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 95mg sodium, 8g total carbohydrate, 2g dietary fiber.

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