



# ALLIUMS



## What is It?

- Alliums are a family of plants that include onions, garlic, leeks, shallots, and chives. This resource highlights onions, garlic, and leeks.
- Onions (*Allium cepa*) come in many types, including yellow, white, red, sweet, and green onions. Yellow onions are stronger, red onions are milder, and white onions are the crispest.
- Washington ranks second nationally for onion acreage, with roughly 19,000 acres.
- Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is a hardy perennial member of the onion family. It is thought to be native to Central Asia.
- Garlic produces a cluster of cloves rather than one large bulb. Each bulb contains a dozen or more cloves and is covered with a thin white skin.
- Washington is a top producer of garlic. There is even a garlic variety named after a town in Washington—Inchelium! This variety was first grown on the Colville Indian Reservation, located in Inchelium, Washington.
- Leeks (*Allium porrum*) do not produce bulbs like onions and garlic but have a small root end that grows underground with long edible stalks and dark green tops that grow above ground.
- Leek stalks taste similar to onions but are sweeter, milder, and more tender.
- Leeks grow well in Washington, especially in cool weather, which makes them a great winter and early-spring vegetable.

## Grow It

- Garlic plants do not produce true seeds, but cloves from the bulb can be saved and planted in the fall or very early spring. Each clove will grow into a fresh garlic plant, genetically identical to the previous plant. Start by breaking a garlic bulb into individual cloves and planting each one pointy side up. Place cloves about two inches deep and four inches apart in loose, well-drained soil with full sun. Keep the soil moist but not soggy as it grows. Garlic is ready to harvest in mid to late summer when the lower leaves turn brown. Using larger cloves when planting will produce bigger bulbs.
  - Hardneck garlic produces a large green flower stalk that grows above ground. The flower stalk, also called a scape, holds miniature cloves of its own and can be cut and eaten while the garlic bulb is still growing underground. This may be a good option for school gardens because scapes can be picked and used before summer. Once picked, or “harvested,” hardneck garlic varieties should be eaten fresh. They do not store as long as softneck varieties.
  - Softneck garlic does not create a scape but still grows bright green tops above ground. Softneck garlic tends to be more productive and faster growing than hardneck because it does not use energy growing a scape and has more available energy to grow bulbs below ground. Once harvested, the green tops can be kept attached and braided together with other mature garlic plants. Clusters of braided garlic can be hung to dry, or “cure.” Curing garlic allows it to be stored for longer.



## Grow It

- Onions can be planted in early spring, using small bulbs called “sets.” Plant them about one inch deep and four inches apart in fertile, well-drained soil with full sun. They need regular watering because their roots are shallow. Set onions take about 3 months to grow and are ready to harvest when the tops fall over and dry out. The size of the onion bulb depends on day length, so choosing the right variety for your region is important. Green onions may be a better alternative for school gardens, as they only take about 30 days to grow. They can be planted from sets or from seed in the early spring and harvested once they have grown to about one inch in diameter at the base.
- Leeks are planted in early spring, often started indoors and then transplanted outside. Plant seedlings about 6 inches deep and 6 inches apart in rich, moist soil with full sun. They need consistent watering and take about 4–6 months to grow. As they grow, soil or compost can be incrementally mounded up around the base of the stems to keep them white and tender. Leeks are ready to harvest when the stems reach about 1 inch thick.



Walla Walla Sweet Onions, credit: WSDA





## Easy Summer Salad Recipe

### Make It

Recipe: Easy Summer Salad  
Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 cucumber, peeled and cubed</li><li>• 1/4 red onion, peeled and cubed</li><li>• 2 tomatoes, cubed</li><li>• 1 clove garlic, minced</li><li>• 2 Tablespoons (Tbsp) lemon juice</li><li>• 1 Tbsp vegetable oil</li><li>• 1/4 teaspoon salt</li><li>• black pepper, to taste</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Add cucumbers, onions, tomatoes, and garlic in a large bowl.</li><li>2. Stir in lemon juice, vegetable oil, salt, and pepper until well mixed.</li><li>3. Serve at room temperature or chill in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour before serving.</li></ol>

This recipe was adapted from South Dakota State University Extension's [Pick it! Try it! Like it! Curriculum](#).



Packing Walla Walla Sweet Onions, credit: WSDA



## Leek and Mushroom Orzo

### Make It

Recipe: Leek and Mushroom Orzo  
Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 cups chopped leeks</li><li>• 1 tablespoon vegetable oil</li><li>• 2 cups sliced mushrooms</li><li>• 1 cup dry orzo (rice-shaped pasta) or bulgur wheat</li><li>• 2 cups low-sodium broth (any type)</li><li>• 1 1/2 cups chopped tomato (fresh or canned)</li><li>• 3 tablespoons cream cheese</li><li>• 1 teaspoon garlic powder</li><li>• 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. In a medium skillet over medium heat, sauté leeks in oil until soft, about 5 minutes.</li><li>2. Add mushrooms and cook until soft, about 5 minutes.</li><li>3. Stir in the orzo and toast lightly, stirring often, for about 3 minutes.</li><li>4. Add broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, stirring occasionally until the orzo is almost tender, about 8 minutes.</li><li>5. Add the tomatoes and simmer until orzo is tender, about 2 minutes.</li><li>6. Remove from heat and stir in cream cheese, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Serve warm.</li></ol>

This recipe was adapted from [Oregon State University Food Hero](#).

### More Recipes to Explore

[Potato Sauté with Onions and Bell Peppers](#) | [EatFresh](#)

[Falafel with Yogurt Sandwich](#) | [Live Well](#) | [Washington State University](#)

[Creamy Potato Leek Soup](#) | [Food Hero](#) | [Recipe](#)

## Eat It

- Since alliums are typically used in small quantities to add flavor to food, they do not contribute significant nutritional value to most meals; however, they can be added to nutrient-rich foods to make them more flavorful and appealing.
- Allium's strong smell is caused by chemicals called organosulfides, which, when used in larger quantities, may have meaningful health impacts. To learn more, you can research some of these cool nutrients:
  - Flavonoids
  - Quercetin
  - Allicin

## Read It

- [Ode to an Onion](#), by Alexander Giardino
- [May Your Life Be Deliciosa](#), by Michael Genhart
- [Stinky and Stringy: Stem & Bulb Vegetables](#), by Meredith Sayles Hughes
- [Leeks Rainy Day](#), by Joanne Roach



Onion harvest, credit: WSDA

## Find It

- Washington alliums are available at many grocery stores. Check the product label or shelf tag to see where a product is grown. They are also commonly found at Washington state's many farmers markets, farm stands, and other local markets. Onions and garlic can be found fresh during summer months, but cured onions and garlic may be found throughout the year. Leeks are typically available September through April.
- Onions, when purchased directly from a farm, may be either cured or uncured. Fresh, uncured onions may arrive with green tops still intact and a smooth, plump outer skin layer. These onions should be stored in a refrigerator and used within 1–2 weeks. Cured onions should be very hard with dry, papery skin. They should be stored in a well-ventilated, cool area, and will last for several months. Do not store onions near other produce, as the onions will release a gas that speeds the ripening—and spoiling—process for other fruits and vegetables.
- Garlic may also be sold fresh or cured. Fresh garlic often has intact green tops and a moist outer skin, while cured garlic typically has the tops removed and dry, papery skin. Garlic should always be stored in a cool, dry place. When stored properly, fresh garlic can be kept for up to a month, while cured garlic can be kept for 6 months or more.
- Leeks should have fresh, firm, and crisp stalks that are dark green on top, and light green in the middle, and with white at the root-ends. Yellow wilted greens and stalks are a sign of aging.



## Find It

- Search for local farms and markets that sell Washington-grown alliums here: [Washington Farms](#) | [Local Farm Finder](#).
- Find a farmers market near you here: [Find a Farmers Market - Washington Farmers Market](#). Many farmers markets and vendors accept WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefit, and SNAP Market Match.

## Play It

- Enjoy the coloring activity on the next page from Oregon Food Hero.



Washington  
State Department of  
Agriculture

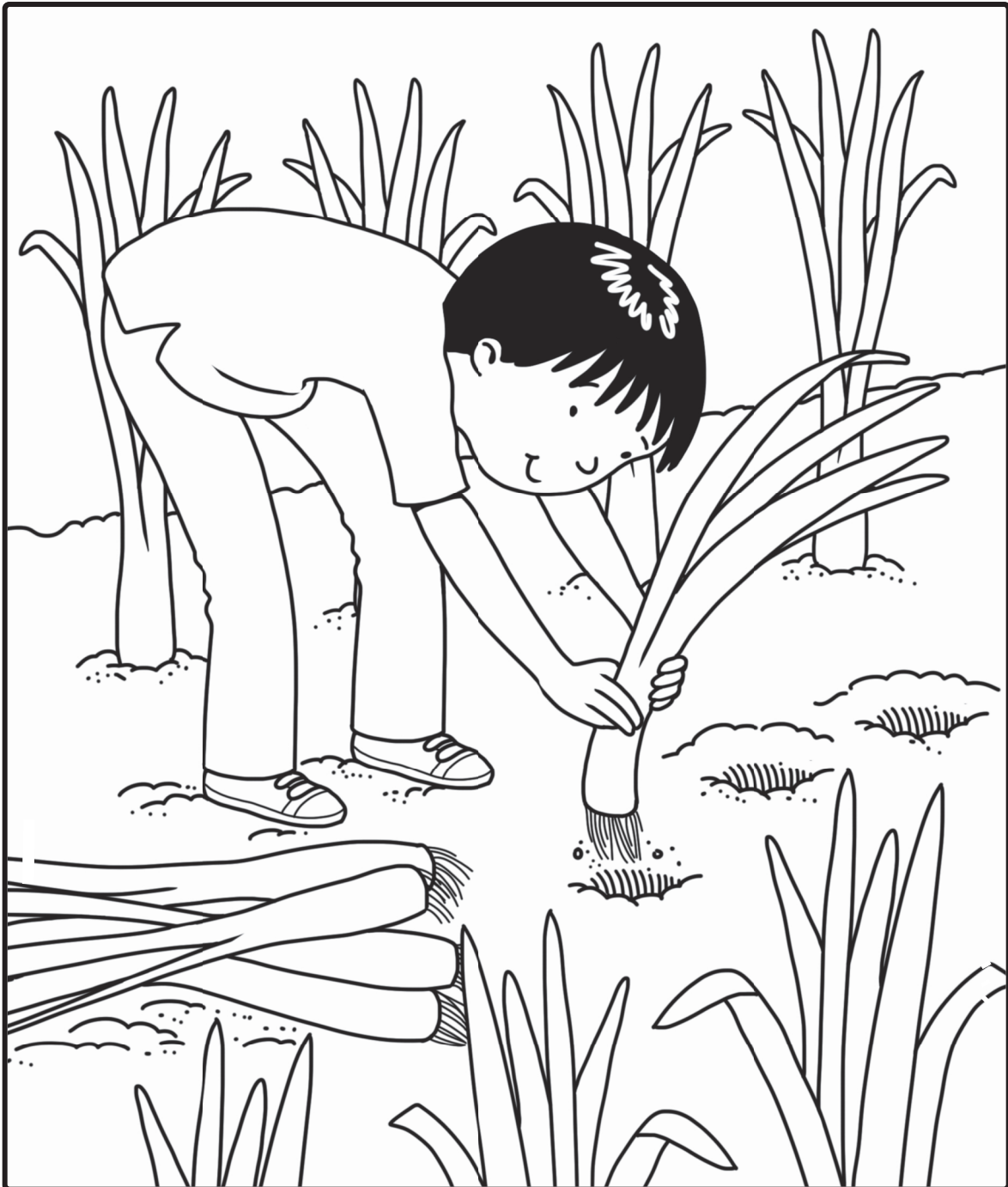
Regional  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Leeks



I like leeks because



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