

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**Leeks: The Sweeter Side of Onions**  
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My familiarity with leeks goes back to my childhood when my Dad would make Potato Leek Soup. He would bring home the long green and white leeks, chop them up and add to potatoes to cook and puree into a delicious winter soup. But leeks are so much more versatile than just in soup. They are an underrated vegetable that many people pass over. If you haven't tried them, grab a bundle at the grocery store or look for them when the farmers markets open up later this spring.



Leeks are a part of the onion family but have a sweeter and milder flavor that is reminiscent of chives or scallions. They look like an overgrown green onion but are actually a different vegetable. Unlike green onions, the top green part is very

tough so the edible part is just the white section. Leeks grow in sandy soil and they grow in layers so it is very easy for the sand to get trapped. Therefore, they need to be washed really well. Cut off the green part and then cut the white in half lengthwise. Now you can wash under running water, opening up between the layers to flush out any sand or grit. If you are going to use them chopped, go ahead and chop and place into a large bowl of water, swishing the leeks around so the sand falls to the bottom and you can lift the leeks off the top.

Leeks can be chopped or sliced into half-moons and sautéed with mushrooms and chicken for a pasta topping with Alfredo sauce or added to a stir fry with beef or combined with chicken in a pot pie. Leeks can be added to pizza or into egg strata or risotto. I have also layered them with potatoes in scalloped potatoes, added them to sour cream with spinach for a dip and sautéed them with Swiss chard or corn. Generally, anywhere an onion might go you can use the more mild leeks. The halved leeks can be braised in chicken broth with seasonings such as white wine, garlic, thyme, etc. and then be topped with bread crumbs or Parmesan cheese for an interesting side dish. One of my favorite ways to use leeks is in quiche. Below is a recipe for a quiche with sautéed leeks, cooked sausage and Cheddar cheese.

So give leeks a try and I bet they will make it into your kitchen more often.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>) and click on Seasonal Eating.

## **Leek and Sausage Quiche**

1 1/2 cups flour  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup vegetable shortening  
4-5 tablespoons cold water  
1/2 pound pork sausage  
1 tablespoon butter  
2 leeks  
1 1/2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese  
8 eggs  
3/4 cup heavy cream  
3/4 cup milk  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

For crust, stir together the flour and salt in a medium bowl. Cut in the vegetable shortening. Add water and mix with a fork just until moistened. Bring dough together into a disk and roll out to about a 12" circle. Roll up on rolling pin and transfer to 9" pie pan. Pinch up the excess dough at the top and flute to form crust. Bake at 400 degrees for about 7 minutes, until surface of crust is set.

Meanwhile, cook the sausage until no longer pink and drain excess grease. Melt butter in skillet. Cut green part and roots off leeks. Cut white part in half lengthwise and wash well between layers. Cut halves again lengthwise and then thinly slice. Add to skillet and cook until softened with a pinch of salt and pepper, about 6 minutes. Place half of the cheese in the bottom of the pre-cooked crust, top with sausage, cooked leeks and remaining cheese. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, cream, milk, salt and pepper. Pour into crust until just full (you will have excess left to scramble for breakfast). Bake at 400 degrees for 50 minutes. If it starts to get too brown, cover top loosely with foil. Remove from oven and let stand for 5-10 minutes before serving.