

# How to keep leeks from blooming



**Gardening**  
Carol Savonen  
Guest columnist

**Question:** My fall planted leeks all bolted before they got big enough to harvest. How can I prevent this from happening again?

**Answer:** Leeks are large, cold-tolerant cousins to the onions. Ideally, leeks are best started from seed indoors in April in seed starting mix. Or you buy starts in the late spring. Then you plant them out in the garden in May and harvest them starting in September into winter.

You are not alone having bolting leeks in the late spring. I get some every year.

I let some of them bolt, or bloom because they have a large globular flower head, much like an ornamental onion. Pollinators love these blooms.

Fall planted, your leek plants got mature enough to respond to this spring's long days. This caused them to send up a bloom and bolt.

Since a week from now the days will be getting shorter again, plant some more leek starts and see if this works better for you.

Purchase transplants at your local garden center, as it is almost too late to plant them now from seed. The plants will be young enough to not send up a flower.

By the time your leeks get big, the days will be getting progressively shorter.

Your leeks will grow bigger, but they shouldn't bloom, as days getting longer and longer are what stimulated your maturing fall planted leeks to bolt in the first place.



Leeks are best started from seed indoors in April in seed starting mix. JOE TRUSKOT/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

## More hints for success when growing leeks:

- Push soil around the edge up to the first leaf notch to blanch or whiten the stems. Or, next time you plant them, put them into a 3 to 4 inches deep trench. As the leeks grow taller, fill in the trenches in stages until the trenches are completely filled in.

- Thin growing leeks to two inches apart.

- Harvest leeks after they are an inch or more in diameter, anytime from September until April.

- Store leeks in the soil until you are ready to cook them up. They'll last a lot longer than in the fridge.

- Freeze sliced leeks in zip lock bags for future use. They don't have to be blanched before freezing them.

Carol Savonen is a naturalist and writer. She is an associate professor emeritus at OSU and tends a large garden in the Coast Range Hills west of Phi-

lomath with her husband and dogs. She can be reached at Carol.Savonen@oregonstate.edu or c/o: EESC, 422 Kerr Admin. Bldg., OSU, Corvallis, OR 97331.

## Retire

Continued from Page 1A

services has risen considerably. My first year we had approximately 27 calls all year. The average number of calls per year now is 205. So it's gone from two calls a month to a call every two days."

He was asked which of the District's accomplishments brings the greatest satisfaction. Swanson said that the Fire Department reaching the high level of service it has attained is very rewarding.

Upgrading the trucks and apparatus to provide a safer working environment and to be able to deliver better service has been a high priority for the District.

Another source of satisfaction is the number of collaborative relationships the Department has established over the years. These relationships include a wide variety of state and federal agencies as well as other fire departments."

The greatest collaborative effort went into funding and constructing the new fire hall.

"So many people and organizations dug deep into their pockets to donate toward the cost. We had so much help along the way. Marion County sold us the property for half its value."

Swanson added, "People really went the extra mile. I went into the post office one day and a guy stopped me and offered to purchase the siren for the new hall. One little girl painted rocks, sold them, and donated the money toward the new building. Individuals and organizations were unbelievably generous.

"Our community is so proud of the new building and they use it all the time. The fire hall has hosted weddings, anniversaries, class reunions, baby and wedding showers, yoga lessons and community meetings, and of course, all

the drills and meetings associated with the department itself. Last year the building was used for over 240 activities and events."

Swanson was asked if the day of the "volunteer" fire chief has passed.

He said, "The trend is moving away from having a volunteer fire chief. It's tough to find someone who can commit to the amount of time it takes. So much more is required than in years past."

Chief Swanson said he is grateful for the chance to work with so many top-notch volunteers in the department. He also is mindful that people have trusted and respected the volunteers who came to help them in times of need.

"We care deeply about the trust placed in us, and we work hard to justify that trust," he said.

"I'll really miss these guys," he continued. "They understand the importance of honesty, loyalty and commitment to the department and the community. They volunteer because they care deeply about helping others. They truly believe in serving the greater good of the community."

"I know I'll miss being the chief," Swanson said, "But it's always good to know when to move on. It's time for me to transition into some different activities. I'm looking forward to trying some new glass projects in my business. And it will be nice to have more time for family and friends. I'll always be grateful that I had the opportunity to serve my community."

All are invited to attend a Retirement Celebration for Fire Chief Swanson on Sunday, June 24th, at the Gates Fire Hall. The Open House will be held between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. A special presentation with speakers will begin at 2:30 p.m.

Carol Swanson is the Gates Fire Board Director. She is not related to Gary Swanson.

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