

Mystery Vegetable of the Week

Baby leeks? Giant scallions? Nope...that's Green Garlic. A culinary secret, green garlic is immature garlic that hasn't yet developed its garlic bulb and has a much milder flavor than the mature bulbs, yet still has that distinct garlic flavor. It can be used in any recipe in place of regular garlic or leeks, and can be used raw or cooked.

How to Wash It

Similar to leeks, green garlic stalks trap dirt and sand within the leaves. Rinse each stalk carefully. Once washed, the entire stalk can be used.

How to Store It

Because it's so moist, green garlic is much more perishable than dried bulb garlic. So you can treat it like a flower: Leave the roots on, stand the shoots up in a glass of water in the refrigerator, and cover them with a plastic bag.

Alternatively, keep them in a plastic bag in the vegetable bin with a damp paper towel in the bag. They should last at least a week.

The white and pale-green shaft is entirely useable, although some cooks like to remove an outer layer or two if it feels tough.

How to Use It

In general green garlic can be used in any recipe that calls for mature garlic. The end product will produce a delicate flavor, more mild than matured raw garlic.

Raw Green Garlic

Mince and add to salads

Pound it into a paste to make green-garlic aioli

Use in salad dressings

Cooked Green Garlic

Poach the last 4" of the tips and dress with a mustard vinaigrette

Blanch in water or chicken stock and puree it. Add the puree to a custard or soufflé.

Dice and sauté the tender portions and add to an omelet or frittata

Chop and add to stir-fry

Chop and add to homemade potato soup

Green Garlic Soup

from Chez Panisse Vegetables

1 pound green garlic (about 8 to 10 plants)
1/2 pound potatoes (new potatoes are nice)
2 medium onions
1/4 pound unsalted butter
Salt
2 quarts chicken or vegetable stock

1. Cut the garlic into thin rounds or half-circles. Unless very tough, the lower foot or so of the stem and leaves are fine to use.
2. Peel the potatoes and cut into 1/2-inch cubes.
3. Peel and chop the onions into small dice.
4. Melt the butter in a heavy-bottomed pot, add the onions, and cook slowly until translucent and tender.
5. Salt, and add the garlic and potatoes. Cook these together for 5 minutes, then pour in the stock and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook the soup until the potatoes are tender. Check the seasoning.

This soup can be served rustic and chunky, or puréed.

Penne with Ricotta and Green Garlic Sauce

Janet Fletcher, San Francisco Chronicle

--1 1/2 cups fresh whole-milk ricotta, or a 15-ounce container whole-milk ricotta
-- 1/4 cup finely minced green garlic
-- 2 tablespoons minced parsley
-- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
-- 1 pound dried penne or fusilli pasta
-- 2 tablespoons butter
-- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese + grated Parmesan for the table

1. Combine the ricotta, green garlic and 1 tablespoon of the parsley in a large bowl; season with salt and pepper.

2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta and cook until al dente.
3. Just before pasta is done, remove 1/2 cup of the boiling water. Whisk enough of the hot water into the ricotta to make a smooth, creamy sauce.
4. Drain the pasta and add to the sauce along with the butter. Toss well. Add 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese a toss again, adding a little more of the hot water needed to thin the sauce. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Serve on warm plates, topping each portion with some of the remaining parsley. Pass additional Parmesan at the table. Serves 4 to 6.

Sunchoke Gratin

Marcela Hazan's Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking

1 pound sunchoke(Jerusalem artichokes)

Salt

An oven-to-table baking dish

Butter for smearing and dotting the baking dish

Black pepper, ground fresh from the mill

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.

Peel the sunchoke and drop them in salted, boiling water. Cook them until they feel tender, but not mushy when prodded with a fork. Ten minutes after the water returns to a boil, check them frequently because they tend to go from very firm to very soft in a brief span of time. Drain when done, and as soon as they are cool enough to handle, cut them into 1/2-inch slices. Smear the bottom of a baking dish with butter, then place the sunchoke slices in it, arranging them so they overlap slightly, roof tile fashion. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, and the grated Parmesan, dot with butter and place the dish on the uppermost rack of the preheated oven. Bake until a light golden crust begins to form on top. Allow to settle for a few minutes out of the oven before serving. Yield: 4 servings