

# roast leeks and herby cheese polenta

Serves 2

40 minutes

2 large leeks, trimmed and washed  
8 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
2 tsp chopped thyme leaves  
2 tsp cider vinegar  
4 tbsp pine nuts  
400ml whole milk  
50g butter  
100g quick-cook polenta  
4 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese

This is a recipe for your prize-winning leeks. You know, the two-foot-long ones that you grew in a drainpipe that won first prize in the village show. No? No, me neither. My leeks are usually more stout, fat nonnas than Amazonian goddesses, but it's nice to dream. Long, silky leeks draped over a creamy bed of polenta is a beautiful thing, but a stockier leek will taste just as good in this quick and comforting supper.

Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C fan/gas mark 7.

Slice the leeks in half lengthways from top to bottom. Arrange in a roasting tin, cut-side up, then drizzle over 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Cover the tin tightly with foil and bake for 20 minutes. Uncover and cook for a further 15 minutes, by which time the leeks will be soft and golden at the edges.

Meanwhile, mix the garlic in a bowl with the remaining oil, and the thyme, vinegar and a pinch of salt. Set aside.

Toast the pine nuts in a dry frying pan over a medium heat for 3–4 minutes, stirring regularly, until golden, then remove from the heat and set aside.

Heat the milk and butter in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Once the butter has melted, add the polenta in a steady stream and stir for 3 minutes until thickened. Remove from the heat, season liberally with salt and then stir in the grated Parmesan.

To serve, spoon the polenta onto warm plates, then pile the roast leeks on top, drizzle over the dressing and finish with a scattering of toasted pine nuts.



# leek loaf

Makes 1 loaf (4 tear-apart rolls)

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1 hour

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10g butter

1 large leek, trimmed, washed and finely sliced

250g self-raising wholemeal flour

100g plain white flour, plus extra for dusting

½ tsp flaky sea salt

1 tsp bicarbonate of soda

150ml whole milk

100g natural yogurt

75g Stilton cheese, or similar blue cheese

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A soda bread dough for dense, heroic loaves. Dunk in steaming hot soup after a muddy session of tidying up in the veg patch; or slice and stuff with hunks of leftover Christmas ham and eat while flicking through seed catalogues by the fire. Either way, best for slow days and leaden skies.

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Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C fan/gas mark 7 and find a non-stick 900g loaf tin.

Melt the butter in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the leek and a pinch of salt and fry for 5 minutes until just softened. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.

Combine the flours, the measured salt and the bicarbonate of soda in a bowl. Whisk the milk and yogurt together in a jug, then pour it into the dry mixture. Combine to make a stiff, sticky dough.

Tip the dough onto a floured worksurface and divide into 4 equal pieces. Flour your hands and shape the pieces into 4 stubby sausages. Each sausage should be roughly half the length of the loaf tin and half the width. Press down on the top of the sausages to flatten the dough into four 4 ovals.

Divide the leek mixture into 4 and pile 1 portion lengthways down the centre of each dough oval. Crumble the blue cheese and press that on top of the leek mixture. Fold the long sides of each oval over the leek filling, to ensconce it almost completely in dough. This will be messy, and you will think there is too much stuffing, but cram it in and don't worry about the mess – it just makes for more tasty crusty bits. You should finish with the seams facing upwards and the filling peeking out of a dough pillow.

Lift the rolls into the loaf tin and arrange them snugly two by two in a single layer so the inside edges form a cross in middle of the tin. Bake for 30 minutes, or until risen and golden. Remove from the oven and tip the bread out of the loaf tin onto a wire rack. Leave to cool for 15 minutes, then tear the rolls apart from one another and serve. Best eaten warm.



