Lettuce

*Lactuca sativa*

When it comes to lettuce, fresher is better … which is why every gardener should grow a plot (or pot) of this salad staple. Plan for as steady a supply as your climate will allow, and enjoy weeks and weeks of “salad days.”

**Location and soil**  Lettuce will perform best in full sun, provided the days are not scorching hot. It is a fast-maturing crop so plan for several plantings. Sow the early crop in full sun, and provide some mid-day shade for heads that will mature in hotter weather using shade-cloth or the noontime shadow of a tall neighboring plant, such as a tomato. Moist, well-drained soil is ideal.

**When to Plant**  Sow seeds directly into the garden about a month before the last expected spring frost. To get a jump on the season, start seeds indoors 2-3 weeks prior to that and when seedlings have at least one set of true leaves plant them in the garden. Continue sowing every week or two until a month before average daytime temperatures will exceed 80°F. Sow a succession of fall, or, if your climate allows, winter plantings beginning in late summer.

**Seed depth and Spacing**  If direct-seeding, sow seeds about an inch apart and cover with ¼ inch of soil. Space rows 12-15 inches apart.

**Germination**  Seed should germinate in less than a week when conditions are right; optimum soil temperature is 70-75°F. Germination often fails in the heat of summer.

**Thinning**  Thin seedlings to 4 inches apart for leaf lettuce, and 6-10 inches for heading varieties.

**Care**  Water in the mornings, allowing the soil to dry between waterings. In hot weather, lettuce may need to be watered every day or two. Direct-seeded plots will need gentle weeding.

**Fertilize**  Add a generous amount of compost to the soil prior to planting.

**Harvest**  Harvest leaf lettuces by cutting the outer leaves as you need them. Alternately, the entire plant can be scissored above the center growing tip; it will continue to produce new leaves as long as the weather is conducive. Cut head lettuces at the soil when they reach a desired size.

**Nutrition**  The darker the leaf, the higher its nutritional value. Red-colored leaf lettuce is an excellent source of Vitamins A and K, and a good source of folate. Green leaf lettuce offers the same benefits, in lesser amounts.

**Potted Pleasure**

An advantage of growing lettuce in pots is that you can easily move them away from the mid-day sun. Choose a frilly leaf lettuce, such as salad bowl, and start it (indoors or out) by sowing seed directly in a large container. Plant another pot the following week for an extended harvest. Not only will you have beautiful containers for very little expense, but the evening’s salad will be just outside the door.
## Lettuce
*Lactuca sativa*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Bibb</th>
<th>Buttercrunch AAS Winner, 1963</th>
<th>Black Seeded Simpson</th>
<th>Oakleaf</th>
<th>Salad Bowl AAS Winner, 1952</th>
<th>Rouge d’Hiver</th>
<th>Romaine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant Spacing</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
<td>4-6 inches</td>
<td>8-10 inches</td>
<td>4-6 inches</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Good fall variety. Leaves will become bitter in high temperatures.</td>
<td>Heat-tolerant. Plant in spring or late summer.</td>
<td>Cold-tolerant. Cut as baby leaves or allow to form a loose head.</td>
<td>Withstands heat better than most. Plant in spring or late summer.</td>
<td>Heat-tolerant, bolt-resistant. Cut as baby leaves or allow to form a loose head.</td>
<td>Best when it matures in cool weather. Excellent choice for baby greens in spring or fall.</td>
<td>Best when it matures in cool weather. Start seeds indoors in spring, or grow in fall.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Days to Harvest</td>
<td>50-60 from seed</td>
<td>50-70 from seed</td>
<td>28-48 from seed</td>
<td>40-50 days from seed</td>
<td>28-50 days from seed</td>
<td>28-70 from seed</td>
<td>70 days from seed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>