

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."

TIP – Lettuce seeds scattered in wide rows and harvested as young, tender baby leaves will regrow for a second, or even third cutting. This method of growing is especially useful in regions where spring is fleeting.

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.

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	Bibb	Buttercrunch AAS Winner, 1963	Black Seeded Simpson	Oakleaf	Salad Bowl AAS Winner, 1952	Rouge d'Hiver	Romaine
							
Description	Dark green, loose-headed heirloom (bred by Lt. Bibb, who served in the War of 1812) has soft, almost buttery inner leaves.	Bibb-type lettuce developed by Cornell University for bolt tolerance. Crisp, tender heads.	Introduced in 1875 and still a popular leaf lettuce. Open-pollinated, with light green ruffled leaves—productive and flavorful.	Grown since the 18 th century; productive and an easy-grower. Tender and mild.	Productive loose-leaf variety with long frilly leaves forms an open head. Tender and sweet.	French heirloom romaine-type with red-tipped green leaves produces 10-12-inch heads.	Dark green, spoon-shaped leaves form erect 10-12-inch heads. Crisp and nutritious.
Plant Spacing	10 inches	10 inches	4-6 inches	8-10 inches	4-6 inches	10 inches	10 inches
Culture	Good fall variety. Leaves will become bitter in high temperatures.	Heat-tolerant. Plant in spring or late summer.	Cold-tolerant. Cut as baby leaves or allow to form a loose head.	Withstands heat better than most. Plant in spring or late summer.	Heat-tolerant, bolt-resistant. Cut as baby leaves or allow to form a loose head.	Best when it matures in cool weather. Excellent choice for baby greens in spring or fall.	Best when it matures in cool weather. Start seeds indoors in spring, or grow in fall.
Days to Harvest	50-60 from seed	50-70 from seed	28-48 from seed	40-50 days from seed	28-50 days from seed	28-70 from seed	70 days from seed