

Lettuce

(Composite family)



Seed Starting/Propagation:

Head lettuces can be started indoors 7 weeks before the last frost date (last week in March), while leafy lettuces can be sown outdoors 4 weeks before the last frost (2nd week in April). Transplant the head lettuces outdoors while planting the leafy lettuce seeds, in full to part shade. Head lettuce should be planted 12" apart or 4 per square foot, leafy lettuce can just be sprinkled and covered lightly with potting soil or compost. Plant every 2 weeks for a continued harvest. Fall crops can be planted when weather is between 50 and 65 degrees (usually 4-7 weeks before last frost date).

Care:

Once seedlings begin to sprout (3-7 days) thin to about 4" apart - just make a mini salad with those starts since lettuce can be eaten any time after it sprouts. Always water in the morning and try to avoid sprinkling the leaves to prevent fungal diseases. Lettuce needs to stay moist all the time or it becomes bitter so don't let the soil get dried out, on the other hand don't over water either. Leaf lettuces are difficult to mulch so generally only head lettuces are mulched and only if there are no slug problems, you don't want to mulch at all if slugs are a problem because they love mulch. Sprinkling some crushed egg shells around the lettuce should keep the slugs at bay. Lettuce can't compete with weeds so keep them weed free at all times.

Companion Planting:

Onion, strawberries, cucumbers, carrots, radishes.

Harvesting and Preserving:

You can harvest leaf lettuce any time after they have sprouted but the ideal time to cut them off for salads is about 3-4" tall. If you cut the leaves 1" from the ground they will re-sprout and continue to produce until the hot weather sets in. Head lettuce is ready when the heads are firm.

Seed Starting:

Let your lettuce go to seed (or "bolt" as it is commonly called), usually once summer comes around. Once they turn yellowish-tan and are dry, cut them off and place in a paper bag. Crush with your hands to separate the seeds and store in a glass container, envelope or plastic bag. They should keep for 2-4 years if stored in a cool, dark place.

Nutrients:

Rich in vitamins A, C, and K, beta-carotene, calcium, iron, folate, and fiber.