

# Lettuce

## *Lactuca sativa*



Lettuce can be harvested year round. It prefers partial shade in the hot summer months. It can be planted directly from seed or from transplants. The wide array of colors and textures make lettuce a beautiful container crop. Plant closely for salad mixes, or spaced apart for heads. Lettuce can even be grown indoors!

### **SITE REQUIREMENTS**

Lettuce needs at least 5 hours of direct sun to produce full heads. Leaf lettuce can produce in partial shade. In the peak of summer, shade lettuce during the hottest parts of the day. Lettuce prefers rich, well-drained soil. Mix 1-3" of composted manure into planting area. Also mix an all purpose granular fertilizer into the bottom of each planting row.

### **PLANTING**

Start early crops indoors mid-March, about 3-4 weeks before the last frost. Harden off seedlings when they are 1-2" tall or 3-4 days before planting outdoors. Seeds and transplants can go directly in the ground mid-April through early October. Plant a new crop ever 3-4 weeks for a continual fresh lettuce harvest. Focus on heat resistant varieties June and July and cold tolerant varieties August and September. Winter lettuce needs to be protected by cold frames or cloches. Lettuce can be grown indoors any time of year.

Plant seeds 1/8" deep, in rows 16-18" apart. For heads of lettuce, thin seedlings 10-16" apart after 2-3 sets of true leaves appear. Transplants should be planted 10-14" apart for loose leaf varieties and 12-16" apart for Romaine and iceberg types. Water in new starts with liquid seaweed or B1.

Lettuce grows extremely well in containers at least 6" deep. In the heat of summer, keep lettuce containers in partial shade and water daily.

### **WATER REQUIREMENTS**

How much water your plants will require depends on the soil and weather. Lettuce loves water and will become bitter if it dries out. Water when the top 1" of soil is dry. Mulch with a 1/2" layer of compost to retain moisture and prevent over heating. Drip irrigation is the best way to provide even moisture and while avoiding disease issues. However, in extremely hot weather overhead sprinklers can help cool the plants and prevent bolting.

### **FERTILIZING**

Side dress rows with an all purpose fertilizer 2-3 weeks after planting. Or apply a foliar spray of compost tea or fish emulsion every 2 weeks until plants are 4" tall.

### **HARVESTING & STORAGE**

Lettuce can be harvested in entire heads or by the leaf. All lettuce is best harvested in the coolest parts of the day. Heads of lettuce can be cut just above soil level once the heads form. Loose leaf lettuce can be picked as soon as the leaves are big enough. Pick a few of the outer leaves at the base leaving the center of the plant intact. Baby lettuce and salad mixes can be harvested using the cut-and-come-again method. Hold a handful of leaves and cut them 3/4" from the soil line. You should have a new flush of lettuce in 3-4 weeks.

It is best to harvest lettuce as you need it. Heads of lettuce will keep in the refrigerator for up to a week. Loose leaves will keep for only a few days.

### **PESTS & DISEASES**

\*Cutworms can often mow down all of your seedlings in one night, or chew holes in the leaves. Spinosad is an organic control for cutworms. Nematodes can help control cutworm larvae.

\*Cabbage loopers are caterpillars that eat large irregular holes in leaves, leaving bits of green excrement. For prevention, cover new seed beds with floating row cover. Spray with Bt to control infestation.

\*Aphid damage often appears as curled, deformed or yellow leaves. You may find colonies of green or grey aphids on the undersides of the leaves and growing tips. Also, sticky sap on leaves and stems and white aphid skeletons are quite prevalent. There are numerous sprays and control measures to help combat aphids.

\*Mildews appear as white patches, preceded by reddish patches, on the leaves and stems. Both downy and powdery mildew are fungal issues. Downy mildew can also cause roots to be misshapen with rough, cracked skin. First remove as much of the infected areas as possible. There are numerous fungicides listed for edibles, such as Serenade, that can prevent the spread of powdery mildew.

\*Snails and slugs leave large holes in leaves or eat new transplants, feeding at night. They often leave iridescent trails on leaves and the ground. Slug baits and beer traps are just two ways to control them. \*Tip burn appears as dark edges on interior leaves. It is the result of a lack of absorbable calcium often due to moisture stress or big temperature swings. Adding lime at planting time, providing consistent even moisture and/or calcium sprays can all help deter tip burn.

\*Gray mold, also known as botrytis, appears as brown or white spots on leaves. These spots will then develop grey fuzz. It is common in cool wet weather. Remove and destroy infected parts. Prevent further spread with a fungicide such as Serenade.

\*Bottom rot starts as dark spots near the midrib of the lower leaves. These spots may also appear sunken and oozing. Remove infected plants before they become slimy. Replant in a new area. Improve drainage of infected area and rotate in crops such as onions or corn.

## **VARIETIES**

There are over 800 varieties of lettuce in America. We have highlighted some of our favorites from each of the four lettuce categories.

Butterhead- Rosettes of succulent leaves with a high oil content produces a small loose head in the middle. Best in cooler weather. Also known as Bibb lettuce.

\*Buttercrunch-49 days. Small, 6", rosette heads. Noticeably thick, juicy green leaves. Maintains sweetness w/out turning bitter in summer heat. Slow to bolt. Choice for winter growing.

\*Continuity (Merveille des 4 Seasons)-56 days. Beautiful, bronze-red outer leaves that encase a tightly packed, light green head. 12-16" across. Excellent flavor. Prematurely bolts if planted in hot weather.

\*Deertounge-46 days. Heirloom. Lime-green, tongue-shaped leaves with buttery flavor. Slow bolting.

Crisphead-Large, tight ball heads with a few loose outer leaves. Iceberg is an example. Best in cooler weather.

\*Great Lakes-80-90 days. Heavy and solid heads with dark green, fringed leaves.

\*Salinas-65-80 days. Flattened pale-green, dense heads.

\*Summertime-48 days. Medium sized heads. Good heat tolerance, slow to bolt. Light green heads with deep green, frilled wrapper leaves.

Looseleaf- Layers of leaves that do not form a head. Best for cut-and-come-again harvest.

\*Black Seeded Simpson-45 days. Heirloom. Crinkly, juicy light green leaves. Great for spring and winter harvest.

\*Lollo Rossa-55 days. Frilled, green leaves are tipped in red. Mild flavor, bolt resistant.

\*Merlot-50 days. Compact, dark red, frilly leaves. Upright heads hold well in heat.

\*Oakleaf- 49 days. Oak-shaped light green leaves. Rarely bitter. Resists bolting.

\*Tango -45 days. Unique, green highly cut leaves resembling endive. Best in cool weather.

Romaine-Distinct heads of long, narrow leaves. Especially crisp flavor. Good for any type of harvest.

\*Jericho-55-60 days. A vigorous, green Romaine lettuce great for summer harvest. Disease resistant.

\*Integra Red-75 days. Elongated, frilly dark loose heads. Great for winter harvest.

\*Outredgeous-50 days. One of the darkest red Romains. Loose, ruffled heads. Selected in Oregon!

\*Romaine (Parris Island)- 68 days. Compact green heads, extra sweet midribs. Heirloom. Best in cooler weather.

\*Winter Density-54-65 days. Excellent for winter harvest. Short, upright 8" heads. Dense, dark green leaves. Great quality. Bolt resistant.