



Growing Lettuce

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Lettuce Need Succession Plantings

Direct seed leaf and head lettuces in early spring as seed will germinate at temperatures between 40-80 degrees F. Make succession plantings every couple of weeks to ensure a constant harvest. Lettuce germinates poorly at temperatures above 80 degrees F. Pre-chill the seed before sowing or start summer crops from transplants.

Where to Plant

Lettuce is a heavy feeder and prefers a rich, well-cultivated soil with good drainage. Add compost or well-rotted manure prior to planting. Mulching helps keep the soil cool and reduces weeds. Grow spring maturing crops in full sun and summer maturing crops in part shade or shield plants from the mid-day sun. Lettuce can be grown very effectively in containers. Water lettuce frequently especially during hot spells.

Sowing the Seed

Sow seed thinly $\frac{1}{4}$ in. deep and 1 in. apart. After thinning, leaf types should be spaced 6-in. apart,

Romaine, 8-10 in. apart, Iceberg, 12 in. apart. You can leave leaf lettuces and mesclun mixes unthinned for "baby" salad greens. You can plant successive lettuce crops up to a month before the first frost. Choose a cold tolerant variety such as "Winter Density" for the late sowings.

Harvesting

Harvest lettuce in the early morning as soon as leaves are large enough to eat. Lettuce matures from 40-90 days depending on the variety, though young leaves can be harvested earlier. Leaf lettuce mature earliest followed by Bibb (Boston) lettuce, Romaine while head lettuces require the longest time to mature. Using scissors, cut leaf lettuces 1 in. above the soil level leaving the plants to re-grow for a second harvest. Head lettuces are harvested when the heads are firm. They can be cut at soil level. Mesclun mixes are harvested when plants are 3-4 in. tall.

Problems You Might Encounter

If your lettuce tastes bitter and the weather has been hot, wash lettuce and place in the fridge for a couple of days before eating. Bitterness can also be the result of lettuce that has over-matured. Plant small crops at regular intervals and harvest often.

Rotate crops to avoid soil borne diseases. Good companion plants for lettuce are most vegetables, carrots, garlic, onion, and radish. Slugs can be a problem. They can be controlled with shallow pans of beer set flush with the surface of the soil. Row covers will protect mesclun mixes from flea beetles.

Learn about growing lettuce from Cornell University>

Learn more about lettuce from Wikipedia >