



Lettuce

Tip Sheet

Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*)

Family: Asteraceae

Season: Cool

Ease of growing: Easy-moderate

Fertility needs: Low

Water needs: Medium

Common propagation: Seed or transplant

Seed facts

Germination temperature: 35°F to 80°F

Germination time: 2 to 15 days

Viability: 2 to 5 years

Direct sow: 2 to 4 weeks before last frost

Transplant facts

Weeks to grow transplants: 3 to 5

Start: March to June

Plant out: April to July

Planning facts

Typical spacing: 8" to 12" in 18" to 24" rows

Plants per square foot: 1 to 2

Succession sow: every 2 to 3 weeks

Days to harvest: 25 (baby) to 60 (mature) from seed; 30 to 40 from transplants

Variety selection

Lettuce can be divided into two major categories: leaf lettuce and head lettuce. Leaf lettuce has the greatest number of varieties available and is the most popular type for home gardens. Leaves are smooth or frilly in colors ranging from light to dark green and red to brown. Common lettuce favorites include romaine, butterhead and colorful leaf lettuce mixes. For summer plantings, it is important to select varieties with heat tolerance.

Preparation and planting

Lettuce is a cool season plant that matures quickly. It will grow on a wide variety of soils but prefers a rich sandy loam or muck. Sometimes seedling emergence is a problem on mineral soils. Provide plenty of moisture early. Before planting, incorporate a balanced fertilizer or compost.

Care

Keep weeds managed when plants are establishing. Tight plant spacing will allow plants to quickly block sunlight from reaching the soil and help with weed suppression.

Major pests

Insects: Cutworms, flea beetles, aphids, leafhoppers, slugs.

Diseases: Bottom rot disease and aster yellows spread by the leafhopper insect.

Harvesting and storage

Harvest head lettuce once heads reach an acceptable size and firmness. Cut off at the stem. For loose-leaf varieties, cut the outer leaves one by one when they're large enough to use and allow the inner leaves to develop. Another method for baby lettuce is to cut all of the leaves a few inches above the soil, making sure not to cut the growing point. This process can usually be repeated one to three times at roughly 10-day intervals before quality deteriorates. Once harvested, use immediately for the best quality. You can store head lettuce for up to three weeks, although butterhead lettuce only keeps for a few days.

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