
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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“Helping Others Grow”

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A Gardener's Wish List

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Buttercrunch.

Photo: Purdue Ext.

It's time to get your Lettuce seed for your fall garden!

Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), is consider an annual leaf vegetable of the Aster (*Asteraceae*) family of which the whole plant maybe be eaten. It is usually eaten (raw) in green salads, sandwiches, or wraps but it can

be cooked and used in soups or grilled. Lettuce is generally considered a good source of vitamins, especially A and K, but the amount varies greatly with each variety. Lettuce was originally cultivated by the Egyptians more than 4,500 years ago. The Egyptians originally used the plant's seed for oil and then it's believed the Egyptians developed the use of the lettuce leaves for food.

Lettuce is considered a hardy annual and grows best for human consumption in cooler temperatures. It's best eaten in the young stage as the leaves become bitter as the plant matures which happens more quickly in warmer weather. Some hardy annual varieties can be overwintered under layered straw or grown in cold frames; however, most leaf lettuces are directly planted in gardens in early spring or fall and harvested once the leaves have reached the desired size. Head lettuce varieties are often planted indoors

and transplanted to individual spots (8" to 12" spacing) in the garden. Lettuce grows best in nutrient-rich soils in full sun (61 to 64 degrees F) with a PH 6.5 to 7 at a 1/4" planting depth. Most varieties of lettuce don't do well with temperatures consistently above 75 degrees or consistently below 45 degrees. Seed should be planted



Romaine

Photo: UK Ext.

when soil temperatures are 40 to 60 degrees F as the lettuce will

have poorer germination above or below that range. After harvest lettuce should be store at approximately 32 degrees and 90% humidity and not with apples, pears, or bananas (which release ethylene gas) for best results. The high water content (approximately 94%) of lettuce makes it best eaten fresh. Lettuce varieties (including wild lettuce) will easily cross pollinate, therefore if you want to save seeds you will need to space the varieties several feet (up to 20 feet) apart depending on your site. Long term storage of lettuce seed should be below zero F temperature for better germination.

Potential Problems:

- Contaminated lettuce has been a source of bacterial (*E. coli* and *Salmonella* poisoning), viral and parasitic outbreaks in humans, therefore it is important to exercise food sanitation in handling lettuce and to wash before eating.
- Many insects can be attracted to lettuce along with diseases including mildews, molds, rots, viral, virus, and others.
- In crop rotation; avoid following radicchio, endive, escarole, or artichoke.

The four main types of lettuce and a few varieties to consider:

- **Loose leaf lettuce:** (the earliest to harvest - 40 to 50 days); Lettuce Bauer (AAS Winner), Black Seeded Simpson, Merlot (heirloom), Red Salad Bowl, and my favorite "New Red Fire".
- **Butterhead (Boston or Bibb):** Lettuce Buttercrunch (AAS Winner), Cherokee, and Tom Thumb (heirloom). *Continued*

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- **Romaine or cos:** Freckles, Red Rosie, Winter Density and Yedikule (heirloom)
 - **Crisphead or Iceburg:** (slowest to harvest -70 to 120 days) Crispino, Red Iceburg, and Iceburg (heirloom)

Resources:

- <https://www.seedsavers.org/>
- University of Kentucky Extension

- Purdue University Extension
 - <https://all-americanselections.org/product-category/edibles-vegetables/lettuce>
 - <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lettuce>
 - <https://www.motherearthgardener.com/plant-profiles/the-history-of-lettuce-zm0z18szphe/>
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