

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET

CORNELL Cooperative Extension
Nassau County



Nassau County
Horticulture Program
Eisenhower Park
East Meadow, NY 11554
516 228-0426

Lettuce

Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*) is a member of the composite or sunflower family, a group that includes endive, salsify and dandelion. It originated in central Asia and is one of the oldest vegetable crops.

Lettuce is a good crop for beginning gardeners to grow. The seeds sprout quickly in cool soil and the plants grow rapidly.

Varieties

Four types of lettuce are available. Loose leaf and Cos or Romaine types are suitable for growing in warmer temperatures. Butterhead or soft head types tolerate moderately warm conditions but do best with cooler temperatures (60°-70°F). Crisphead varieties, which are the major lettuces of commerce, require the most skill to grow and tend to form seed stalks rather than heads following a few days of temperatures above 75°-80°F.

Soil preparation and fertilizer

Lettuce may be successfully grown in nearly all moderately fertile garden soils that drain well and warm up early in the spring. Organic matter may be supplied by plowing under green manure crops (such as winter rye) that are sown in the fall and tilled under in the spring. The addition of compost or an application of 2 to 3 bushels of cow or horse manure for each 100 square feet should be applied at least four weeks before planting. This should be spaded or rototilled into the upper 6 to 8 inches of soil. A soil pH for lettuce of 6.0 to 6.5 is desirable.

An application of a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-5 or 10-10-10 should be applied prior to planting at a rate of 4 to 5 lbs/100 sq. ft. and incorporated into the top 3" of soil. A second application of fertilizer should be applied in bands on either side of the row when lettuce plants reach a height of 2" to 3". This application should be lightly cultivated into the soil and followed by a thorough watering.

Planting and care

Seeds can be sown directly in the soil as soon as it warms up and can be worked, generally mid March-early April. Seeds may also be started indoors and transplanted outside in mid April-early May. If your soil

takes a long time to dry out in the spring, prepare the beds in the fall. Raised beds work well for lettuce because they warm up more quickly in spring and can be worked earlier. Working the earth when it is too wet can destroy the structure of the soil.

Plant seeds 1/4" deep about 1/2" apart in rows roughly 12" to 18" apart. Thin seedlings to 4" to 6" apart for leaf and small head varieties and 12" to 14" apart for large heading varieties. Thinning should not be delayed because crowding produces weak spindly plants with little foliage. Succession plantings, made at intervals of 7 to 10 days, will provide continuous harvest. Crisphead and Romaine types can also be planted again in late July for a fall crop. Loose leaf and Bibb can be planted from mid August through early September.

Use of a mulch keeps weeds down, conserves moisture and keeps the soil cool. It is extremely important to keep soil moist during the growing season. You can use black plastic mulch, straw, disease and insect-free grass clippings and leaves. Cultivation also prevents weed competition. Use care when hoeing because lettuce is shallow rooted.

Pests

Lettuce may be attacked by several fungus diseases as well as by cutworms, slugs and aphids. Submit sample to local Cornell Cooperative Extension office for ID and diagnosis. Try not to grow the plants in the same spot year after year. Well-drained, sandy loam soils are less prone to serious disease problems.

Harvest and storage

Loose leaf varieties are ready for harvest earliest, from 41-50 days after sowing. Individual leaves may be harvested at any time. Harvest until stems begin to elongate or bolt. Bolting is caused by excessive heat and is usually accompanied by increasing bitterness. Romaine lettuce may be harvested as loose leaf or allowed to achieve the mature head size - about 70-85 days. Butter and crisp heading varieties should be permitted to form semi-firm to firm heads before harvest: about 80-95 days for crisp-head, 55-80 days for butterhead.

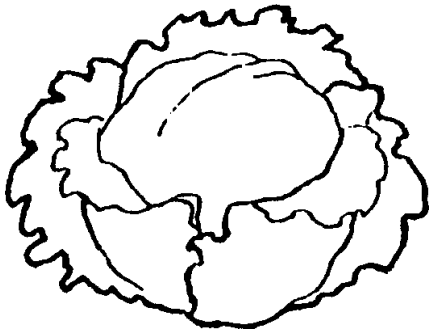
B-1-18 CMS:cms reviewed RT 1/03

-continued-

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

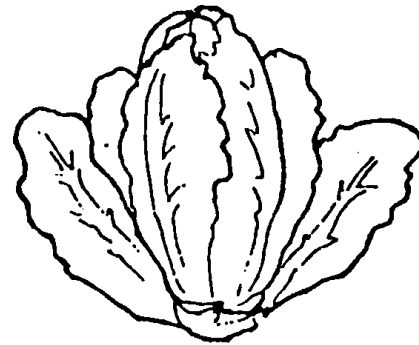
Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

Varieties



Crisphead (Iceberg)

Tom Thumb, Ithaca, Great Lakes 659 (Fall), Summer-time, Burpee Iceberg



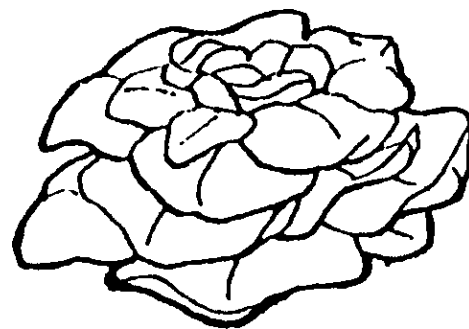
Cos (Romaine)

Parris Island, Valamaine (Mosaic Resistant), Cosmo, Green Towers, Little Gem



Loose leaf

Black Seeded Simpson, Salad Bowl, Green Ice, Slobolt, Oak Leaf, Red Sails, Lollo Rossa, Ibis, Ruby, Prizehead, New Red Fire



Butterhead

Winter Density, Buttercrunch, Summer Bibb, Sangria, Four Seasons, Dark Green Boston, Esmerelda