

SFA

Seeds for Africa

Lettuce

Buy lettuce plants at the nursery for planting when night-time temperatures stay above 30 degrees F. Otherwise, sow seeds directly outdoors as soon as the soil can be worked in spring (see "How to Plant Vegetable Seeds Outdoors").

Choose a site that gets full sun in cool-weather areas, partial sun in warmer climates or for summer plantings. The ideal pH is 6.0 to 7.0 (see "How to Have Your Soil Tested").

Till the soil thoroughly, breaking up soil clumps and removing stones and other debris. (Lettuce seeds are tiny, and any obstacle can hinder germination.)

Dig in plenty of compost and well-cured manure to ensure the kind of soil lettuce needs: well-draining yet moisture-retentive, and rich in the nitrogen necessary for good leaf development.

Set plants 8 to 16 inches apart, depending on the variety. (Check the plant label or a comprehensive gardening book for mature size.) When in doubt, err on the side of distance - crowded plants and poor air circulation invite disease and insect problems.

Keep the soil moist, but avoid watering in the evening: Foliage that stays wet overnight is prone to disease. Mulch to conserve moisture and keep the soil cool, and feed every three weeks with seaweed extract or compost tea.

Ensure a full season's worth of greens by making successive sowings 10 days apart and by choosing heat-resistant varieties for late-spring plantings and cold-resistant ones for harvesting well into autumn.

Begin cutting leaf lettuces as soon as they're big enough to use. Harvest heading types when the heads are firm and fully formed.

No part of this document may be reproduced, copied or distributed without the express written permission of the Directors of Seeds for Africa Limited.

www.seedsforafrica.co.za

Seeds for Africa