

# LETTUCE

A quick glance at a seed catalog or packaged seed rack will reveal a wide assortment of healthy lettuces and salad greens that have hit the home garden market recently. Lettuce is a popular choice for home gardens for its ease to grow, its nutritional value, and its delicious flavor and texture. Lettuce can be grown all season long and harvested consistently, but it does prefer cool, moist weather, and many varieties will bolt to seed under stressful heat conditions. There are four types of lettuce, which include: crisphead, butterhead, loose leaf, and romaine. Grow lettuce in cool temperatures in full sun for optimal flavor and quality.

## SOIL PREPARATION

Lettuce prefer a sandy soil, rich in organic matter, well drained, and not too heavy. They also need full sun exposure. Before planting, incorporate 1-2 inches of well composted organic matter, Humic, and 1 lb. of all-purpose fertilizer (we recommend "That's all it Takes" complete fertilizer or Happy Frog Organic Tomato & Vegetable Food) per 100 square feet and work them in to a depth of 4-6 inches. Heavy, clay-based soils must be amended with compost and organic matter to encourage and allow for good root development. For best results, add 2-4 inches of a variety of different types of organic matter and 50 lbs. of Zeolite soil conditioner per 100 square feet each fall for multiple years to increase drainage and nutrient availability. By doing this yearly, over time you can create a better growing environment for your garden plants to thrive in and produce. Please consult our Soil Preparation Guide in the attached appendix.

## PLANTING

Lettuce can be planted from seed or transplant. It is easiest to grow from seed because of its quick germination in cold soils. Seeds should be planted ¼ inch deep in rows 12-18 inches apart. The seeds will germinate in 7-10 days but germination drops when temperatures exceed 75 degrees, so plant in very early spring or late summer/early fall for best results. For best germination, cover lightly with Coconut Coir (about 1/4 inch) and water with Baicor Seed Starter for the first 2-3 waterings. Once the seed germinates and plants reach about 1-2 inches tall, thin the individual lettuces to about 8-12 inches apart to reach maximum growth and head development. If you want smaller, leafier lettuces, thin plants to about 1-2 inches and harvest when they are small and tender. Plants are usually ready to harvest in 50-75 days. Don't forget, fall is one of the best seasons for leafy greens! Plant again in August and September to maximize the potential of your garden space.

## VARIETIES

With so many great varieties to choose from, here are a few of our favorite varieties of lettuce: Mark's Heat Tolerant Mix, a mixture of 2 red leaf varieties, romaine, butterhead, Red Romaine, and Simpson lettuces. Colorful, tasty, and nutritious, it's one of our all-time favorite mixes; Esmerelda and Buttercrunch resist heat and form heads quickly; Plato II and Outback are tall, heat tolerant romaines with sweet, crunchy leaves; Lollo Rossa, Red Romaine and Royal Red, round out our selection of heat resistant, sweet red-leafed lettuces.

## WATER

Water Lettuce frequently and consistently applying 1-2 inches per week. Water fluctuations will yield tough and bitter leaves. A light mulch after the plants reach 2-3 inches helps the soil retain moisture better. Mulches and regular watering with a soaker hose maintains consistent soil moisture better than any other method.

## FERTILIZER

Side dress the rows with nitrogen (20-0-0) applying 1/4 cup per 10-foot row 4 weeks after planting to encourage growth. For quick results, use a liquid fertilizer like Monetrey All-Purpose or Seedlingers Universal Plant Food (organic). Your plants will grow like weeds and be ready to harvest in 45-60 days.

Mark suggests:  
*"Plant lettuce thinner than you think! Each little seed will become a large cluster or head of lettuce. Plant lightly in the beginning and you won't waste seed by thinning later."*

