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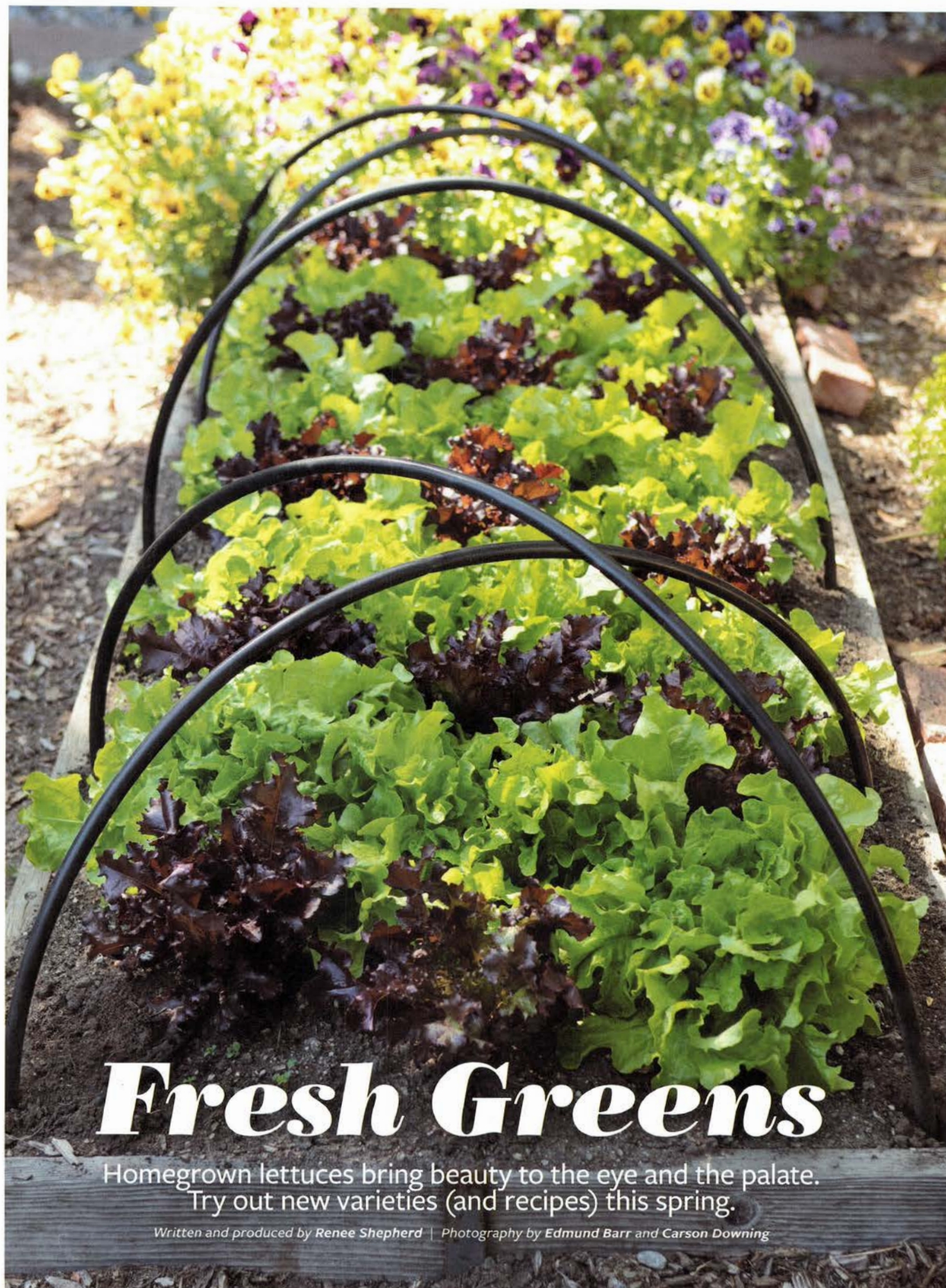
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Plus!
SHOULD YOUR NEXT ANIMAL



Fresh Greens

Homegrown lettuces bring beauty to the eye and the palate.
Try out new varieties (and recipes) this spring.

Written and produced by Renee Shepherd | Photography by Edmund Barr and Carson Downing

Lettuce you grow at home is in a league all its own.

Fresher and more flavorful than supermarket varieties, homegrown lettuce opens up a new world of tasteful opportunities. Even in a limited plot of ground, you can soon be enjoying truly luxurious lettuce.

There are dozens of heirloom and modern heading varieties to try. From the tight, semisolid base form of firm, crunchy romaines to the softly folded, meltingly tender, and buttery rosettes of succulent butterheads, big head lettuces shine in cool weather and offer so much from a small packet of seeds. Some are so beautiful they make glamorous additions to flowerbeds, but their real pleasure is in the eating.

Lettuce can be planted from seed in early spring, either started in small pots indoors or sown directly in the garden. They can be planted again in late summer or early fall, when daytime temperatures are in the 60s or low 70s. Here are a few lettuces to try:

Romaine: These heavy heads of tall, upright, broadly oblong leaves clustered around thick, juicy, full-flavor hearts are sweet and crunchy with lots of substance. You can select from crisp, tender, and heat-tolerant cultivars in green, red, or speckled varieties. Use romaines for whole-meal salads when you want leaves with juicy crunch and substance to pair with cubed or sliced cooked meats, cheeses, or nuts. Romaine holds up well under heavy, creamy dressings.

Batavian: A European type especially popular in France, this luscious class of lettuces isn't often seen in the United States. Batavians are available from seed in both red and green leaf varieties. Mature heads are dense, heavy rosettes of crispy leaves

with an open, butterheadlike shape. Batavian lettuce is resistant to bolting in hot weather. Wonderful for salads and sandwiches, it can also be shredded for tacos or combined with citrus fruits, strawberries, sweet onions, avocados, or cooked shrimp.

Butterhead: Called butterhead, Bibb, Boston, or limestone lettuce (names vary in different areas), these softly folded, smooth-leaved, light green rosettes are becoming increasingly popular. Some butterheads form loose, open rosettes, and others develop tighter, semisolid heads with undulating leaves prized for their rich texture and flavor. Don't overwhelm their delicacy with heavy commercial dressings; a simple homemade vinaigrette blended from olive oil and mild rice vinegar works best. Butterheads pair perfectly with soft cheeses and toasted nuts.

For Resources, see page 94.



OPPOSITE: Black hoops support bird netting, when needed, to protect tasty tender leaves. **ABOVE:** The deep red speckles of 'Flashy Trout Back' appear as the lettuce sprouts. **ABOVE RIGHT and RIGHT:** Renee Shepherd tests seeds in her Southern California garden before selling them through her company, Renee's Garden. She has made a career of searching out the best vegetables, herbs, and flowers.

'Queen of Crunch' crisphead



Red and green romaines



'Ruby Gem' baby romaine



'Rhapsody' butterhead



Luscious Leaves

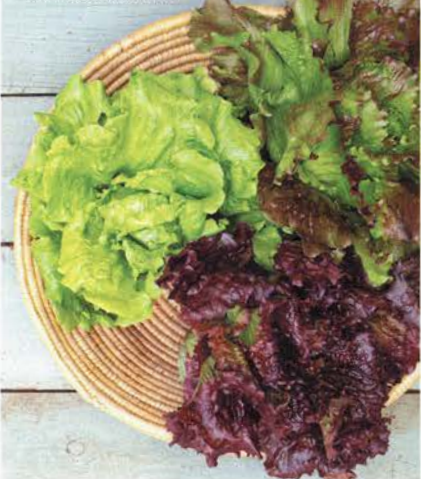
The many varieties of garden lettuce are all in the same species, *Lactuca sativa*.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: 'Queen of Crunch' is heat-tolerant and matures into attractive heavy rosettes. Pick red and green romaines at baby sizes or let them grow into dense, heavy heads. 'Ruby Gem' is a short romaine with deep red leaves above a green heart. The long pointed leaves of 'Red Deer Tongue' grow outward and upward to form loose heads. 'Merveille de Quatre Saisons' is a centuries-old French heirloom Bibb lettuce. Pick just the outer leaves of 'Flashy Trout Back' as it grows, or cut it as a head. 'Dutch Redina', Batavian 'Nevada', and French 'Cardinale' have good heat tolerance. 'Rhapsody' butterhead has a satiny texture and rich buttery taste.

'Red Deer Tongue'



Batavian 'Nevada',
French 'Cardinale',
'Dutch Redina'



'Flashy Trout Back'



'Merveille de
Quatre Saisons'



Butterhead Lettuce with Fresh Raspberry Merlot Dressing Recipe courtesy of reneesgarden.com

START TO FINISH 20 minutes **SERVINGS** 4

- 1½ cups fresh raspberries or frozen raspberries, thawed and drained
- ½ cup Merlot wine
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 3 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 3 Tbsp. sour cream
- 2 Tbsp. good-quality raspberry vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- 1 medium shallot, minced
- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 large head butterhead lettuce (Bibb or Boston)
- 2 Tbsp. chopped fresh chives and/or parsley
- ½ cup fresh raspberries
- ⅓ cup toasted pecan pieces

1. For dressing, in a food processor or blender combine the ½ cups raspberries, the wine, oils, sour cream, vinegar, honey, shallot, garlic, mustard, salt, and pepper. Cover and process until well blended. Taste and add more honey as desired.
2. Cut lettuce head into wedges; arrange on plates. Sprinkle chives and/or parsley over lettuce. Drizzle with dressing.* Sprinkle with the ½ cup fresh raspberries and the pecans.

*TIP Store remaining dressing in an airtight container up to 3 days.

PER SERVING 49 cal., 12 g total fat (1 g sat. fat), 1 mg chol., 46 mg sodium, 8 g carb., 4 g fiber, 4 g sugars, 2 g pro.

