

## Lettuce

*Lactuca sativa*



Origin: North Africa



Varieties we grow: Lolla Rosso, Lolla Bionda, Red Salad Bowl, Green Oak Leaf, Lobjoits Cos

Other common varieties: Little Gem, Butterhead

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Latin name *Lactuca sativa* comes from the Romans who referred to lettuce as lactuca (lac meaning "dairy" in Latin), referring to the white substance, latex, exuded by cut stems. Sativa means "cultivated" and is often added to Latin names of popular crops including coriander or garlic.



## GROWING LETTUCE



**APPEARANCE AND SIZE** Lettuce leaves comes in many decorative shapes, textures and colours. There are two types: hearting lettuces that have a dense centre and are harvested as whole head and loose-leaf lettuces which have less dense rosettes and allow for picking individual leaves.



**GROWING SEASON** Lettuce can be grown all year round, but it will need protection in the winter, such as a greenhouse or a cold-frame. Some varieties of lettuce are especially sensitive to high temperatures and intense sun, so pick the appropriate cultivar for a particular season.



**SUNLIGHT** Lettuce is a cool-weather crop, therefore they benefit from some shade with 15C being the optimum temperature and 24C putting lettuce at a high risk of stress. It is recommended that lettuce receives between 4-8 hours of sunlight, depending on the variety.



**SOIL** Prefers well-draining soil with an adequate supply of nitrogen and therefore a good supply of compost and a neutral pH of 6-6.8.



**WATERING** Prevent the soil from drying out by watering thoroughly. Ensure that plants grown in containers get watered more often, as they will dry out faster.



**HYDROPONICS** In a hydroponic system, lettuce likes an EC of 1.3 and a pH of 6. A warm environment and 14 hrs of light encourage quick growth. Harvest the whole head instead of individual leaves.

## USING LETTUCE

### COMMON USES

The flavour of lettuce tends to be watery and mild with a hint of bitterness. It is usually eaten raw, providing a crunch to any salad, such as the Caesar salad. Use it for stuffed lettuce cups or lettuce wraps to replace tortilla wraps and bread. In Chinese cuisine, lettuce is added to salads where all vegetables are cooked and then served hot or cold. It can also be grilled or made into a pea and lettuce soup. Who knew lettuce was this versatile? Check our website [HERE](#) for recipes.

### ALTERNATIVE USES

Add lettuce to a smoothie. Lettuce has also been used in a BLT cocktail, which consists of bacon, lettuce and tomato mixed with vodka. Brave enough to try it?

### MEDICINAL

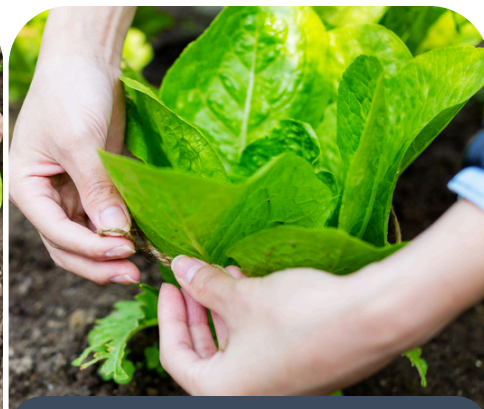
Wild lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) has been used medicinally since Ancient Egypt. The milky fluid secreted by some species of lettuce, called the lactucarium, was thought to have opium-like qualities without the addictive properties. Its sedative effect was pain relieving and sleep inducing. It has also been promoted as a psychotropic (mind-altering) substance. However, there is little research to support these effects.

## HARVESTING LETTUCE

Harvest a heading lettuce at the stem and cut off the whole head. For a loose-leaf lettuce, harvest the outer leaves. Dispose of any dry and damaged leaves and leave the middle in tact for the plant to grow out of for future harvests. Harvest around 1/3rd or up to half of the plant to promote it growing back.



whole head



individual outer leaves

## STORING AND PRESERVING LETTUCE

### DRYING

Dehydrate leafy greens such as lettuce, chard, spinach and kale to make a green powder. To dry in a dehydrator, place leaves on a sheet in a single layer and dry at 40C for 4-8 hours. To dry in the oven set your oven to the lowest setting, open the door to reduce moisture, and cook for 2-4 hours. Check in periodically and discard any burned leaves. Store in a dry, clean jar out of direct sunlight for up to a year. Add to dishes just before serving, do not cook.

### FREEZING

Wash and dry the lettuce, separate the leaves from the head, and freeze in airtight bags. Once thawed, use in casseroles and as a spinach substitute. This works better on more robust varieties, such as butterhead or romaine.

### STORAGE

Fresh lettuce can be stored in the fridge and used within 7 days of harvesting. Keep in a plastic bag, crisper drawer or an airtight container to maintain moisture. You can also place the stem into a shallow jar of water, keeping leaves out of it. Change water every other day. If you place it in the sun, it may grow a few extra leaves!

# COMMON PESTS

## APHIDS

### IDENTIFY

- More likely found on plants grown indoors.
- Usually signified by green and white small bugs that will be present in large numbers, some will have wings.
- You may spot sticky honeydew on the plant leaves which is secreted by the aphids, or tiny bite marks on the plant stem where the aphids are feeding, which then results in misshapen leaves.



### TREAT

- Check your plants regularly as there is a higher chance of controlling aphids if spotted early.
- Remove aphids when spotted by hand or wash off with water.
- You can also thoroughly spray with a mix of water and dish soap (1tsp dish soap to 1L water) to suffocate the aphids. Spray twice a week and wash the produce before eating.

## OTHER

- Birds may peck at young seedlings. Cover them with mesh if this is an issue.
- Slugs and snails can decimate the soft lettuce leaves. Deter them by keeping your growing area clear of debris or wood and keeping the grass short to reduce hiding spaces. You can use beer traps to attract and drown the slugs and snails or design your space to attract hedgehogs, which feed on them.

