

HOW TO GROW- LETTUCE.

Fun fact- The ancient Egyptians were the first to cultivate lettuce. They grew lettuce for the seeds which they used for cooking and medication !

08, June, 2020



*The basic information-
annual edible .*

- Sowing- dependant on variety, sowing season from March-September.
- Temperature-cool season crop <20celsius.
- Sun- part shade in summer, full sun in autumn/winter.
- Crop rotation- intercrop or use to fill empty spaces.


WHAT TYPE DO I CHOOSE ?

There are several different types, all varying in taste, use and look.

- *Cos (Romanian)- long and flavourful, crunchy leaves.*
- *Semi-cos- shorter with very crunchy, sweet leaves.*
- *Butterhead-smooth and soft leaves with a compact heart.*
- *Crisphead / Iceberg- large heart with crispy leaves, lacking flavour.*
- *Loose leaf varieties- also called salad bowl types they don't form a heart and so they are slow to bolt, and are cut over longer periods of time. They are the most ornamental and nutritious of lettuce and can be used as 'cut-and-come-again'.*

SOWING AND PLANTING OUT

Sowing times all depend on the variety of lettuce you are growing. Varieties appropriate for the season/ time of year must be grown- for example 'Winter density' is suitable for sowing at the latest September and is a hardy overwintering lettuce allowing an early spring harvest, while 'lollo rossa' can be sown at the latest July and is a salad bowl lettuce.



If you are wanting lettuce throughout the year then remember to



successional sow !, for example 'all the year round' can be sown from March-july so sow every two-three weeks.

Lettuce doesn't do well when sown while the temperatures

are high, the seeds struggle to germinate and become dormant. To overcome this direct sow seeds in a shady/ cooler area of the garden, water well after to cool the soil or you can sow in the afternoon- This is because several hours after sowing is when they are likely to become dormant if it's too hot, this way it will be evening and cool for the seeds.

If you have sown lettuce indoors in cellular trays or pots they are ready to plant out when they have five-six leaves. Plant out into moist, fertile soil, and make sure they are planted to a depth so the bottom leaves just touch the soil- firm in well and water in.

As long as the lettuce is planted in an open area that in hot weather is part-shaded it will grow very well, providing its watered well and has nutrients to sustain it.

AFTER-CARE

Fertilize-if growth is slow application of a high nitrogen fertiliser, such as fish, blood and bone, seaweed or compost tea


Weeds, it's important to keep the garden weed free in general it increases the risk of pests and diseases getting your plants and they take nutrients from the soil.

Watering, when there's been a dry spell or it's been hot it's important to keep on top of the watering. When watering don't give a little watering often make sure that it floods the ground and fully saturates the soil. This encourages deep rooting and strong plant growth. The most crucial period is about ten days before maturity to keep the plant watered.

Protection- growing under cover, if you are wanting to sow lettuce early then either start indoors or cover with cloche when sown outdoors. This will raise the temperature on average by 5 celsius. The same goes for overwintering lettuce like 'winter density' cover with a cloche/ fleece.

DEALING WITH SLUGS !

There are a few good ways that work well, are organic and are friendly to the environment and people/pets.



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- *Slug pellets- ferric phosphate slug pellets are extremely effective.*
 - *Beer / yeast traps, a tin can in a hole with the top flush with the ground- add either beer or you can just use yeast, follow the instructions on the packet to activate it in the water just as you would when making bread.*

HARVESTING AND STORAGE.

If growing cut-and-come-again lettuce or loose leaf varieties they are the quickest to mature, ready in about ten weeks. When cut back, leave about 3cm of the plant and as long as they are regularly water and fed- if needed, it will start regrowth in about a week. Like picture- Cos, butterhead and crisphead will be prone to bolting once mature so harvest them when they are ready by checking the firmness of the heart.



We would love to hear how you got on, send any pictures and questions to - cardenden@orevalleyha.org.uk