

Lettuce

Americans eat more than 25 pounds of lettuce annually per person - it's a staple in salads, burgers, and sandwiches. And there are many varieties available in addition to iceberg: there's leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, and butterhead, as well as red lettuce and green lettuce. Generally, the leaf lettuces have more flavor and nutrients than head lettuces. Cool growing conditions will help keep lettuce from bolting, or going to seed, which turns the flavor of the plant bitter. Amazingly, one leaf of lettuce, made mostly of water, has only *one* calorie while containing 7% of your daily Vitamin A requirement. Easy to grow and quick to reach harvest size, lettuce belongs in every garden.

Growing: When/Where to Plant

Lettuce is relatively cold-tolerant, even the seedlings will usually withstand short periods of freezing temperatures. Lettuce can be transplanted or direct-seeded in late winter in NC. The fall crop should be seeded about 80 days before the expected first hard freeze. Lettuce can also be sown in a cold frame or hotbed.

How to Plant/Spacing

Plant the seed 1/4 to 3/8 inch deep. If planting in rows, space them 4 to 6 inches apart. As plants grow, thin seedlings to a spacing of 1 to 2 inches. This will produce stocky plants and reduce the chances of damping-off.

Soil Requirements/Fertilizer

A good crop of lettuce depends on vigorous growth, and will do best in fertile, well-drained soil with high organic matter. Adequate nutrients and a continuous moisture supply are essential. Soil pH should be 6.0 to 6.7. Take a soil test, and follow the recommendations if lime applications are needed or if soil macronutrients need to be supplemented. Plants may benefit from some additional nitrogen early in their growing season - look for a fertilizer recommended for vegetables, and read and follow all instructions on the product label.

Harvesting

Most head lettuce will be ready for harvesting in 70 to 80 days after seeding. Leaf lettuce can be harvested at almost any stage of growth; cut the outer leaves first and the center will continue to produce new leaves.

MORE RESOURCES AND INFORMATION:

Central NC Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables, Fruits and Herbs

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs>

NC Extension Gardener Handbook – Chapter 16, Vegetable Gardening

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/16-vegetable-gardening>

Vegetable Gardening: A Beginner's Guide

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/home-vegetable-gardening-a-quick-reference-guide>

NC Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/lactuca-sativa>

LIST COMPILED AND DISTRIBUTED BY NC STATE EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERSM VOLUNTEERS, GUILFORD COUNTY
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