

Grow your own

Luscious Lettuce

SPACING

That depends on the choice of salad ingredients and how the garden is to be arranged. Although rows are traditional, they tend to require more space and are not necessary in a small garden. Many people prefer to plant "patch-work" style reserving small areas of perhaps one or two square feet each for various items planted side-by-side. Not much more than a window box or a large pot is needed.

Micro leaves and baby salad leaves are real favourites for slugs and snails. Growing them in containers can make protecting them easier.

Grow salad leaves in full sun, making sure the soil is well-drained, They are particularly well suited to growing in containers and grow-bags! You have to make sure whatever you use has drainage holes. You can also sow salad leaves in the garden.

Sow from mid-spring to late summer. putting individual types of salad seed in rows. thinly at 1cm deep. Alternatively one of the easiest ways of sowing salad leaves is to simply sprinkle a mixture of seed lightly on the top of soil surface. Then cover with about 1 cm of soil. As the seed grows, thin out some seedlings by removing with your thumb and forefinger. This gives more room for plants to develop. Thin seedlings as soon as the first true leaves appear and continue until the plants are 30cm apart. Don't throw away the seedlings you thin out can be washed and eaten too. Water when the soil is dry, preferably in the early morning. This gives the plant more time to absorb and refresh. Early in the year sparrows can be a problem as they find young lettuce plants irresistible. Protect with remay cloth, chicken wire or something similar.

HARVESTING

Salad leaves are known as cut and come again crops. This means when the plants reach between 10 - 15cm tall use scissors to cut the entire plant to 2.5cm above the ground. The plants will regrow and can be harvested again in 3-4 weeks. Greens can taste bitter after several cuttings, particularly in hot weather. Spent plants that are weak, bitter or unproductive should be removed. Harvest leaves just before you want to eat them or store in the fridge in a polythene bag for a couple of days. You will usually be able to cut the salad leaves three or four times, so the secret to having salad leaves all summer is to sow several times at 14day intervals. So once you finish with one crop. you can start the next.

CULTIVARS FOR USE

While lettuces may be the backbone of your salad, today's salad bowls are filled with an explosion of color, texture and taste! Try planting Bistro salad mix, mesclun mix, arugula, radicchio, swiss chard, spinach, rumex, frisée, watercress, mache & sorrel. Herbs such as dill, parsley, cilantro, basil, and chervil can be a great tasty additions to your salads.

If you really want lettuces then using the same growing and seeding methods above why not try these. There are several different types of head lettuces: butterhead lettuces have an open habit. are quick-maturing and tolerate poorer growing conditions. Cos types have an upright growth habit and oblong head. Crisphead types produce large hearts of curled and crisp leaves and are more resistant to 'bolting (going to seed prematurely) This group includes the iceberg lettuces. High soil temperatures in summer can prevent some cultivate from germinating. Sow in the evening. water with cold water and provide some shade to keep temperatures down. Remember these plants will benefit from a mild fertilizer to replenish their nutrients. Use a liquid organic fertilizer as after all we are trying to be healthy!



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