



Growing Lettuce and Other Greens

Let us grow some Lettuce, an easy to grow and fast to harvest crop. Lettuce can be sown outside directly into the garden or is a great choice for container gardening, including in smaller bowls you can keep handy on the patio.

Here in Montana we have the most success with 'loose leaf' type lettuces. These do not form the dense heads that we find in the supermarket but provide ample leaf growth that continues to grow as you harvest tasty leaves. You can grow head lettuce such as Iceberg or Romaine but you will need to set out plants and keep your fingers crossed we do not get hot weather too early. Plant seeds inside four weeks before frost, harden off plants and set them out when all danger of frost is past.

Sow loose leaf lettuce seeds directly into the ground once the soil temperature has reached 50^of. Lettuce is an all leaf crop so high nitrogen will boost your harvest. You can till manure into your lettuce patch before you plant or top dress with a high nitrogen fertilizer such as blood meal, cottonseed meal or fish emulsion once your plants get going. Seed to harvest can be as short as 40 days!

Lettuce does not require full sun and even likes a little shade in the hot afternoon. Lettuce does not care for hot weather and will *bolt*, that is send up a seed stalk, if it gets too hot. If the plant bolts, it is done producing leaves and typically by mid-summer your lettuce is all done for the season. The remaining leaves will get bitter. You can, however, sow a second crop at this time, taking advantage of the heat for germination and hope for cooler weather as it matures.

If you don't have a shaded spot, provide temporary shade with the same kind of covers you would use to protect plants from frost but replace the plastic with Remy[®], a spun fabric that shades the plants.

Harvest leaves as soon as they are big enough to eat. Cutting will encourage the plant to produce more leaves. Give it another dose of nitrogen after you cut a large number of leaves. Very few pests bother lettuce but slugs can cause problems. Leave them a shallow bowl of beer to drown in so they'll leave your plants alone. Bury it so the rim is level with the ground.

Another salad green to grow is spinach. Spinach can be sown from seed into the garden as soon as soil can be worked, often up to 6 weeks before last frost! Like lettuce, it does not care for heat but you can plant successive plantings every two to three weeks to keep a crop coming along for most of the spring and into mid-summer before the heat arrives in earnest.

All kinds of salad greens can be easily grown in shallow, wide containers. Think bowl shaped or a shallow crate. Sow seeds inside on a sunny windowsill and harvest greens in late winter or spring. Use potting soil and be sure to add a nitrogen rich fertilizer such as blood meal or cottonseed meal.