



# HOW TO GROW LETTUCE



Crisp head variety

## INTRODUCTION

Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*) belongs to the family Asteraceae. It is not related to the Cruciferae such as cabbage.

It is a good source of dietary fibre, calcium, iron and vitamins A, B, C and E.

Just a few seedlings planted weekly, will keep the home continuously supplied with this leafy vegetable.

## VARIETIES

There are two major types of lettuce; namely Loose-leaf and Crisp head (Iceberg) types.



Loose-leaf variety

Examples of loose-leaf varieties are: Green Mignonette and Bronze Mignonette.

Some common crisp head or iceberg varieties are: Trinity, Trinity Star, Lyra, Emperor, Sahara.

## SOIL PREPARATION

The lettuce roots are very thin and delicate and extend over a very small area, and thus are very susceptible to drying out.


Therefore, the soil should be well tilled and sufficiently drained but must allow for good water retention.

Lettuce responds well to organic manure and does not tolerate acid soils. Generally to achieve these requirements, mix one handful of well-rotted manure with the soil and incorporate 5g (1 tsp) of hydrated agricultural lime in each planting hole.

## PLANTING

Lettuce may be planted on a wide variety of containers or on beds. See factsheet on "Container Planting". In a home garden situation, lettuce may also be intercropped with herbs and other vegetables.

## SOME OTHER COMMON PROBLEMS OF LETTUCE

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	CONTROL
<p><b>Bitterness, premature flowering, stunted leaves and weak heads</b></p> 	<p>These can be caused by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged dry conditions</li> <li>• Planting old seedlings</li> <li>• Harvesting the crop too late.</li> </ul>	<p>These can be controlled by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watering the plants regularly</li> <li>• Always using healthy seedlings</li> <li>• Harvesting the plants at the appropriate time</li> </ul>

## HARVESTING

Lettuce leaves may be harvested as needed, however heads are best at 4 –6 weeks after transplanting. Heads are harvested by making a sharp clean cut at the base of the plant.

Lettuce can be placed in a perforated plastic bag and stored in a refrigerator for up to 14 days. It can be a rewarding experience to successfully grow lettuce to meet your household needs.

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Loose-leaf Spacing



Crisp head Spacing

The seeds take about 4-5 days to germinate and are ready for transplanting in 2 -3 weeks.

If producing seedlings, see the factsheet “Producing Seedlings for the Home Garden”. If purchasing seedlings, select healthy seedlings, making sure they are not too old. A healthy seedling is characterized by:-

- A shoot: root ratio of about 2:1.
- Having about 3–4 leaves and the outer leaves should be at least 5 cm (2 in).
- White roots

When several plants are planted in the same area, the recommended spacing for crisp head lettuce should be 30 cm (12 in) apart within rows and for loose-leaf varieties, the plants should be 20 cm (8 in) apart within rows. The distance between rows should be 38 - 45 cm (15-18 in).

Seedlings should be transplanted late in the afternoon. This will prevent the plants from wilting caused by the stress of transplanting.

When transplanting:

- Place one seedling into each planting hole and be careful not to cover the base of the first leaves with soil.
- Ensure that the seedling is firmly positioned by pressing the soil around it with your hand.
- A few days after transplanting, apply a soil insecticide and soil fungicide at the recommended rates to protect the seedling in its early stages.
- Keep the plants free from weeds at all times.

### WATERING

- Water the plants immediately after transplanting. Thereafter, water daily if there is insufficient rainfall.
- When watering, add water to the ground at the base of the plant so as to avoid splashing soil onto the leaves.

Remember to use clean water to irrigate the plants.

### FERTILIZER APPLICATION



- Immediately after transplanting, apply 5g (1 tsp) of a granular NPK fertilizer such as 12:24:12 to each plant to encourage root growth. Be sure to place this fertilizer at least 5cm (2 in) away from the plant.

- On the 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> days after transplanting apply a granular NPK fertilizer e.g. 20: 10: 10, at a rate of about 1–3 tsp (5–15g) per plant depending on the health of the plant.
- Alternatively a foliar fertilizer can be used weekly e.g. 20:20:20 at a rate of 5g (1 tsp) to 4 litres (1 gal) of water. Apply 125 ml (1/2 cup) of this mixture in the leaves and root area of each

### PEST AND DISEASES

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is the best approach to controlling pests and diseases in a home garden. In this method, pesticides are not heavily relied upon and cultural as well as biological methods are used.

For further information on IPM see the factsheet titled “Integrated Pest Management for Home Gardeners”.

PEST/DISEASE	SYMPTOMS	CONTROL
<p><b>Leafminer Damage</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is an insect that tunnels its way through the leaves and makes unsightly marks</li> </ul>	<p>Leafminers are controlled by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good weed control,</li> <li>• avoiding excessive use of fertilizers</li> <li>• and if necessary, use insecticides that are safe to human health and the environment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leaf Spot Symptoms</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a fungus that causes lesions to appear as small yellowish spots on the older leaves.</li> <li>• Diseased areas then spread and the spots turn brown.</li> </ul>	<p>Cercospora can be controlled by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring there is proper drainage,</li> <li>• good weed control</li> <li>• a safe foliar fungicide.</li> </ul>