

LETTUCE

Lettuce is a cool-weather crop that is fairly cold tolerant. However, the thin fragile nature of the leaves makes them susceptible to freezes and drought. Lettuce is best grown as a spring or fall crop. There are four distinct types of lettuce.



* **Leaf types**--Leaves are loosely arranged and colors may range from green to pale red to deep red. Leaf lettuce matures rapidly and is the most reliable type of lettuce to grow in Kansas, especially from seed.

* **Romaine or cos**--This lettuce forms a loose or soft head with thick stronger flavored leaves. It is an excellent addition to a mixed salad and takes longer to develop than leaf lettuce.

* **Butterhead**--Tender rounded leaves that form into a loose or soft head are characteristic of this succulent and delicious lettuce. It takes longer to grow than leaf lettuce and can be started and planted as transplants as well as direct seeded.

* **Head or crisphead**--Head lettuce takes nearly twice as long as leaf lettuce to develop. It is most reliably grown using transplants, and the fall season is the best time to grow head lettuce in Kansas.

When to plant

Sow lettuce seed in mid-March or set plants in early April. Sow seeds for a fall crop in mid- to late August for leaf or bibb types, or in late July to early August for head or romaine types. Lettuce grown in hot weather will have a strong, bitter flavor. You may improve the flavor by storing the lettuce in a plastic bag in a refrigerator for several days.

Spacing

Sow seeds thinly $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep, and water consistently until the lettuce emerges. Thin to a plant every 6-8 inches, or set transplants at this spacing. Rows may be as close as 15 inches apart.

Care

Lettuce is shallow rooted, and the root system is fairly spindly. Therefore, it will require careful cultivation so as not to damage roots. Regular watering and fertilizing are necessary. Over-watering in heavy soils can cause root or head rots.

Harvesting

Cut the heads of heading types slightly above ground level and remove damaged, dirty, or excess leaves. Select full sized leaves of leaf lettuce individually so that the plant will continue to produce. Store lettuce in a plastic bag in a refrigerator immediately after harvest because it will become limp quickly.

Common concerns

Aphids

Tipburn (brown, dead edges of the leaves)

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