



SALAD GREEN TALKING POINTS

2. The History of lettuce

- As a cultivated crop, lettuce originated in or around the Mediterranean basin. Wild forms of lettuce, Egyptian tomb paintings and written accounts of lettuce culture that date back to 79 A.D. all support evidence that salad greens are one of the oldest known vegetables.
- Lettuce was among the first vegetables brought to the New World by Christopher Columbus, probably on his second voyage. During the early years of the United States, an assortment of cultivars and leaf varieties were grown, mainly in home gardens and later in market gardens around cities.
- At the start of the 20th century, the western shipping industry took off, greatly expanding the crop's popularity and range. Initially, the early western shipping industry relied on New York lettuce cultivars. However, a disorder called "brown blight" destroyed numerous early plantings and by 1922, the magnitude was great enough to prompt the USDA to assign a plant breeder, I.C. Jagger, to Southern California to develop disease-resistant cultivars.
- Jagger used healthy plants and some that he found in the affected New York lettuce fields. He eventually released three cultivars under the name "Imperial," which remained popular until the late 1940s, when the first true iceberg lettuce was developed by T.W. Whitaker.
- Two types of iceberg lettuce, Great Lakes and Calmar, dominated lettuce production until 1975, when the USDA replaced Calmar with the

Salinas group. Salinas remains the most commonly grown lettuce today

3. How do lettuce/salad greens grow?

- Lettuce seeds should be sown thinly in rows or in wide-row bands about 18 inches to two feet apart to utilize garden space. Seeds should be covered with no more than one-half inch of fine soil, which should be kept moist for 10 to 14 days.
- About three to seven days after planting, lettuce will emerge from the ground. Young roots typically lengthen to about two to three centimeters before the seedling begins to extend upward. The cotyledons (the leaf in the embryo that emerges, enlarges, and becomes green) are the first leaves to emerge from the ground, and their storage reserves are utilized for early development. The first true leaves emerge soon after the cotyledons sprout and the process of photosynthesis begins.
- Growers thin out the plants to allow good air circulation between the plants and help prevent foliar, or leaf diseases. Leaf lettuce should be thinned to about three inches between plants in all directions.
- All salad greens are harvested by hand. They are cut with a sharp knife near the base of the head and any damaged outer leaves are removed. Then they are usually packed in a box right in the field.
- Salad greens consist of hundreds of varieties of different lettuce, which is a temperate annual plant of the family Asteraceae, or sunflower family. Initially, a lettuce plant will have a short stem called a rosette, but when it blooms, the rosette

lengthens and branches, ultimately producing several flower heads that look similar to dandelions. This process is called bolting. When grown to eat, lettuce is harvested before this bolting process begins.

- *L. sativa* has been grown as a crop plant dating back to ancient times, when it was often used in meals to aid sleep. Some lettuces, like iceberg, have been specifically cultivated to remove the bitterness from their leaves. These lettuce varieties have a high water content, lighter colored leaves and little nutrient value. **Leaves with greater pigmentation contain more antioxidants and nutrients. Thus, darker leafy greens contain more nutrients and are better for you.**

4. What season do we pick Salad Greens?

- Lettuce is grown year-round, but since lettuce seeds germinate and grow best at lower temperatures, and can even withstand a moderate freeze, the peak harvest season is January through May. It also does well as a fall crop and can be planted in August; however, higher soil temperatures in the summer can inhibit germination. Shading the newly planted seeds with a board or a light covering of mulch can help protect the seeds and improve germination.
- The United States is the largest producer of lettuce in the world, with most production occurring in California and Arizona (Katz and Weaver 2005). Other areas with suitable climates include the Mediterranean Coast, the eastern portions of England, the Negev

Desert in Israel, and parts of Australia. Major producers in terms of nations include Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and Greece.

5. Why should we eat salad greens?

- Two cups of green leaf lettuce provides:
 - More than 100 percent of the recommended Daily Value (DV) for Vitamin A, and more than 150 percent of the recommended DV for Vitamin K. Vitamin A is essential for healthy vision, while Vitamin K is necessary for proper bone growth.
 - An excellent source of Vitamin C (22% DV), which may help to prevent against heart disease.
 - A good source of the essential mineral manganese, which helps support the immune system, maintain normal blood sugar levels and support.

6. How do you pick out good Salad Greens?

- Look for dark green leaves. Choose lettuce heads that are compact and firm.
- The heads of lettuce should be stored at the store in a cooler with misters to keep the leaves so they don't wilt.
- To store greens, wrap them in slightly damp paper towels. Place in the refrigerator in a plastic bag with holes for air. If stored properly, most greens (butterhead and leaf lettuce) will keep for one week. Romaine lettuce can last for about 10 days.

- Rinse lettuce with cold water or soak loose leaves in cool water and stir with your hand to remove dirt. Lay lettuce leaves on a paper towel and gently pat dry.

Serving Ideas

- Dark lettuce leaves have more nutrients.
- Serve side salads for lunch and dinner.
- Add lettuce to sandwiches.
- Try different types of salad greens to find out which kinds of lettuce your child likes most.
- Ask your child to “invent” their own salad. Let them pick out the vegetables and other toppings they want to use.
- Bring color to your salads by adding carrot strips, shredded purple cabbage, or even fruit (e.g., oranges, apples, raisins).
- Use 100 percent fruit juice, flavored vinegars and herbs to make low-fat salad dressings.

Facts

- Americans eat about 30 pounds of lettuce every year. That’s about five times more than what we ate in the early 1900s.
- In the United States, lettuce is the second most popular fresh vegetable (behind potatoes and tomatoes which are technically fruits).
- The salad green variety referred to as *mache* is also nicknamed *lamb’s lettuce* for its tender, velvety leaves.
- The ancient wild relative of lettuce contained a sedative-like compound. Ancient Romans and Egyptians would take advantage of this property by eating lettuce at the end of a meal to help induce sleep.

Varieties of Lettuce grown in the US

- There are literally hundreds of lettuce varieties available, although

some vary only slightly in size or days to harvest. For practical purposes, lettuce is divided into four distinct groups:

- **CRISPHEAD**-which forms a firm head with a crisp texture and distinct veins. Iceberg is the most commonly grown commercial variety.
 - **Ithaca** - A good choice for fall crops. Heat can cause the heads to be looser, but resistant to bolting.
 - **Summertime** - Large heads are slow to bolt in summer heat, while the heads are forming. Frilly leaves resist tip burn. 70 days
- **BUTTERHEAD**- also forms a head but the texture is more soft and pliable with less distinct veins.
 - **Bibb** - An heirloom lettuce that has remained popular over the years. Bibb has a tender texture and “The Cook’s Garden” says that the term “butterhead” was coined to describe it. 57 days and 45 days
 - **Buttercrunch** - An American cousin of Bibb, but more tolerant of hot weather. 65 days
 - **Marvel of Four Seasons** - A popular European variety having green leaves tipped with red. This variety can be planted late in spring as well as late in summer and fall. Not quite four seasons, but very close. 68 days
- **LOOSELEAF** - Forms a kind of bunch instead of a head.

Looseleaf lettuce resprouts from a cut stem without losing quality in flavor or texture.

- **Salad Bowl** - An All America Winner. It's easy to grow and fairly heat resistant. There is also a red salad bowl variety. 60 days
- **Lollo Bionda** - A frilled edge Italian lettuce that is easy to grow and has a long harvest period. Lollo Rossa is its red cousin. 48 days
- **Oakleaf** - Oakleaf and its many varieties grows in a rosette and works well as a cut and come again type. There are red oakleafs, curly oakleafs, royal oakleafs...\

- **COS or ROMAINE**, an upright plant with long narrow leaves that look coarse but are actually quite tender.
 - **Rouge d'Hiver** - A red leafed romaine with good cold tolerance which also performs well in spring and summer, making it ideal for succession planting. 60 days
 - **Little Gem Mini Romaine** - An English heirloom that grows to only 5-6 inches with the crisp texture and the romaine flavor of its big brother. 56 days

Why has lettuce become so popular to grow?

- Lettuce crops (*Lactuca sativa*) have been growing in popularity over recent years and for good reason.
- Lettuce is one of those crops whose fresh picked taste simply can't be equaled by anything you can buy at the grocers.

- Most lettuce varieties are not yet grown commercially in any quantity.
- Greens don't travel or store well.
- No store could possibly stock the amount of lettuce varieties you have available to grow.
- Greens are relatively easy to grow.
- Greens are high in mineral, vitamin and fiber content.
- It is cheaper to grow your own lettuce than pay premium prices for gourmet greens