

Lettuce

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What's So Great about Lettuce?

What is Lutein?

Lutein is a natural substance found in brightly colored fruits and vegetables, including green leafy vegetables. Lutein is also found in the retina of the eye. Some studies have shown eating foods with lutein may protect against some age-related eye disorders. Of the lettuce varieties, Romaine lettuce is the best source of lutein.

Most greens are good sources of Vitamin C, beta-carotene, iron, calcium, folate, and fiber. Generally, the darker the green, the more nutritious the leaf. Each variety of lettuce provides different amounts of nutrients. Mix varieties together for a balance.

Lettuce is low in calories and sodium. All varieties are free of fat and cholesterol.
Lettuce is inexpensive and available year-round.

Selecting and Storing Lettuce

At the market

Handle lettuce carefully in selection, storage, and preparation to avoid damage. Damage can affect the taste and texture of lettuce as well as the nutritional value.

Look for Signs of Freshness

Iceberg and Romaine lettuce leaves should be crisp. Other lettuce types will have a softer texture, but the leaves should not be wilted. In most varieties, look for a good, bright color (light to medium green). Some varieties of lettuce, like Red Leaf, have red leaves.



Avoid

- Heads of Iceberg that are very hard and lack a bright green color or that have bumps
- Lettuce with a tan or brown area around the edges of the leaves
- Any decay like wilting or sliminess



Pre-washed and bagged lettuce is nutritious, but expensive. Pre-washed and bagged lettuce should not be brown with wilted edges; check package expiration dates.

Storage Tips

Lettuce keeps well in plastic bags in the crisper section of the refrigerator. Iceberg lettuce stores the best, lasting about two weeks in the refrigerator. Romaine lettuce lasts ten days. Butterhead types and endives last about four days. For the lettuce varieties that don't last long, buy only as much as you need at one time and use immediately.

- Do not store salad greens near fruits like apples or bananas. This can cause brown spots on the lettuce leaves and cause spoilage faster. Washing the lettuce before storing also causes spoilage.
- Slicing lettuce with a knife can cause the lettuce to become brown. So when using a knife to chop lettuce, eat the lettuce within a few days.
- Remove any insects in greens that are bought in bunches.
- Place those leaves with roots in a glass of water with a bag over the top of the leaves and then place the glass in the refrigerator.

Did you know?

Lettuce was discovered as a weed growing around the Mediterranean. For more than 4500 years Egyptians have been eating lettuce, and it has been served with meals ever since. Greek scholars discovered many of the varieties of lettuce. Christopher Columbus was the first to introduce lettuce to the Americas.

Nutrition Facts

1 1/2 cups Lettuce

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 1/2 cups shredded Lettuce: Green Leaf (85g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 15	Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 30mg	1%
Total Carbohydrate 4g	1%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 2g	
Protein 1g	
Vitamin A 40%	* Vitamin C 6%
Calcium 4%	* Iron 0%

Key nutrient data is circled in green.

Varieties of Lettuce

Lettuce varieties can be put into four groups: romaine, butterhead, crisphead and looseleaf. Each group has its own growth and taste characteristics.

Romaine

Also known as Cos, this lettuce has a long shape with darker outer leaves. The tight, inner leaves are good in salad because of the light, mild taste. Romaine lettuce is a good source of Vitamin A.



Butterhead

Varieties of Butterhead lettuce (which looks like a blooming rose) and Bib (which has a small cup-shaped appearance). This variety of lettuce has loose heads, grassy green-colored leaves, buttery texture, and a mild flavor.



Crisphead

The most popular type of Crisphead is Iceberg lettuce, which is known for its crispy leaves and mild flavor. The pale green lettuce looks like cabbage with its leaves packed together. Crisphead Lettuce has less Vitamin A than other types of lettuce, which is why it may be a good idea to mix Crisphead lettuce with other salad greens.



Looseleaf

Looseleaf variety does not grow to form lettuce heads. Instead, it has loose leaves with curly edges joined at the stem. The flavor of Looseleaf is light and mild. Common types are Oak Leaf, Red Leaf, and Green Leaf.



Fitting Lettuce into MyPyramid



The green triangle of MyPyramid is the vegetable section. Vegetables may be raw or cooked; fresh, frozen, or canned. Age, gender, and level of physical activity determine the daily vegetable need. For a 2000 calorie diet, it is recommended having about 2 1/2 cups of vegetables daily. For more information on vegetable serving sizes go to www.mypyramid.gov.

Preparation Tips

Fresh Lettuce

For all lettuce types, remove any browned, slimy, or wilted leaves. Then wash and pat dry the leaves to remove dirt or insects.

A salad spinner is a great tool for cleaning lettuce. Put lettuce leaves in the center bowl, add some water, and spin the handle. It works like a gentle washing machine, forcing the dirt to be removed from the lettuce leaves. Pat the leaves dry, and eat!



Lettuce that is pre-washed and pre-cut can be a fast way to make a salad for a family. Open a bag; add a few other favorite vegetables, and dressing and in seconds you can have a side dish or appetizer! Top a salad with grilled chicken, beef, fish or vegetables for a complete meal.

Ideas for Cooking Lettuce

Lettuce can be braised, steamed, sautéed and even grilled.

Try cutting a head of radicchio or romaine in half lengthwise. Brush extra virgin olive oil over the top, and grill until the lettuce softens and begins to brown.

Recipe Collection

Nutrient Data

1 cup Main Dish Salad:

Calories 140, Total Fat 2 g, Saturated Fat 0 g, Cholesterol 5 mg, Protein 10 g, Carbohydrate 21 g, Dietary Fiber 6 g, Sugar 5 g, Sodium 320 mg, Vitamin A 60%, Vitamin C 70% mg Calcium 15%, Iron 10%

1 cup Taco Salad:

Calories 210, Total Fat 7 g, Saturated Fat 2 g, Cholesterol 60 mg, Protein 18 g, Carbohydrate 18 g, Dietary Fiber 5 g, Sugar 5 g, Sodium 400 mg, Vitamin A 10%, Vitamin C 45% mg Calcium 6%, Iron 15%

Main Dish Salad

Makes 12 servings

Ingredients

1/2 head romaine lettuce
 1/2 head red cabbage
 3 medium carrots
 1 cucumber
 1 green pepper
 2 stalks of broccoli
 3 medium tomatoes
 32 ounces canned kidney beans or garbanzo beans
 6 ounces cheese
 1/4 cup nonfat salad dressing

1. Wash and drain all vegetables well.
2. Thickly slice red cabbage and tear lettuce into pieces. Toss them in a large serving bowl.
3. Chop the remainder of vegetables and add them to the salad bowl. Drain and add kidney beans. Top with cheese.
4. Pour on the salad dressing just before serving and toss together lightly.

Taco Salad

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients

1 head butter lettuce, or any other small tender lettuce, torn into small pieces
 2 chopped fresh tomatoes
 1/2 cup chopped green pepper
 1 pound ground turkey or beef
 1 small chopped onion
 15 1/2 ounces canned pinto beans (drained)
 3/4 cup salsa or taco sauce

1. Rinse and drain lettuce. Tear it into bite-sized pieces and place in a large serving bowl. Toss in tomatoes and green pepper.
2. Brown meat and onion in frying pan. Drain off fat and liquid.
3. Add beans and salsa to meat mixture; mix well. Spoon on top of the lettuce.
4. Serve with additional salsa. Refrigerate leftovers.



How to Grow Your Own Lettuce

When to plant

Leaf, Cos and Butterhead lettuce can be planted anytime in the spring when the soil is dry. Lettuce wilts in hot summer days; so, spring planting should be done at least one month before the hot days (greater than 90 degrees Fahrenheit) of early summer begin. Frequent watering is needed for the plant to grow well.

Head lettuce needs more care than other types of lettuce. Start these plants indoors. Transplant to the garden in early spring.

Spacing and Depth

Plant seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep (10 seeds per foot) in single, double or triple rows 12 to 18 inches apart.

Care

Lettuce has shallow roots, so it should be handled carefully. Water often for high-quality lettuce, keeping the soil moist. But know that over-watering (puddles around the plant), can lead to plant disease. Steady temperatures help lettuce to grow. Mulches can help keep the ground temperature steady.

Harvest

Leaf lettuce may be cut whenever it is large enough to use. Leaf lettuce is largest in 50 to 60 days after planting. Butterhead varieties make small, loose heads in 60 to 70 days after planting. Cos varieties grow taller to make long, medium heads.

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Educator in the phone book or at <http://www.extension.psu.edu/>

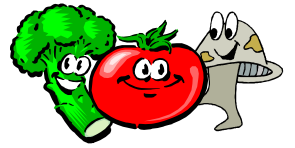
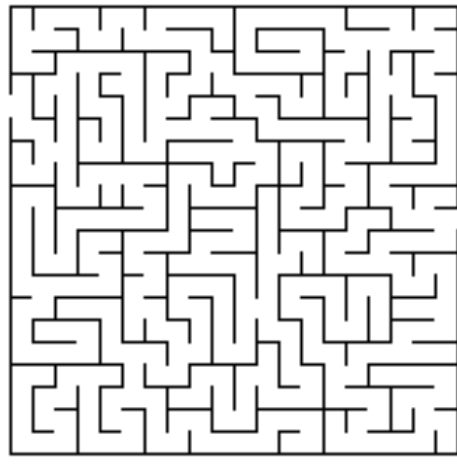


Activity Alley

Lettuce on the Loose!



Directions: Help Lettuce find his way through the maze to his friends Broccoli, Tomato and Mushroom! After you help him, Lettuce and his friends can help you make a tasty salad.



Look for Lettuce! Word Search

What's your favorite way to eat lettuce?

In a salad? On a sandwich?
Draw pictures of your favorite meals with lettuce. And the next time you are the store, you help remember to buy the ingredients.

