



# The Phantom Gardener

Organic from the start, sustainable for the future

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## Lettuce

If you've only eaten supermarket lettuce, you're in for a real treat by growing your own. There are hundred of lettuce varieties, each with its own distinct flavor, texture and color. Plus, the brightly colored varieties contain more nutrients than pale iceberg. There are two types of lettuce:

Head lettuce varieties produce heads of tightly wrapped crisp leaves. Iceberg is a head lettuce. Butterhead and bibb lettuces form loose heads. Romaine forms a tall, narrow head.

Leaf lettuce varieties don't produce heads at all; rather, the leaves grow up and out. As you harvest the outer leaves, the inner ones continue to mature. Leaf lettuce is one of the easiest and fastest maturing crops for your home garden.

**1. Prepare.** Sow lettuce in spring as soon as the soil can be worked. Loosen soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches using a shovel or tiller. Mix in some compost or slow-release fertilizer to provide plants with nutrients. Then rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks.

**2. Plant.** Use a hoe to create a shallow furrow, and then sow lettuce seeds about a quarter-inch deep and an inch apart. Cover seed with soil and press gently.

**3. Grow.** When seedlings are 2 or 3 inches tall, thin them by removing extra plants, using the small leaves in salads. Thin to one plant every 4 inches for leaf lettuce varieties, every 12 inches for head lettuces. Keep seedbed moist until lettuce germinates. Apply a layer of organic mulch, such as straw, to conserve moisture and keep soil cool. Pull weeds that sprout nearby.

**4. Enjoy.** Harvest lettuce in the morning, when leaves are cool and crisp. Harvest leaf lettuce regularly, while leaves are small and tender. Wait to harvest head lettuce until the heads have formed.

Lettuce grows best in the cool temperature of spring and fall. Continue sowing small beds every two weeks for a continuous harvest through early summer. Start another crop in late summer for a fall harvest.

## At a glance

### Exposure:

Full sun. Light afternoon shade will extend the harvest.

### Planting time:

4 to 5 weeks before last spring frost.

### Planting depth:

1/4 inch deep

### Spacing in row:

1 inches apart; thin to 4 to 12 inches apart, depending on type.

### Time to harvest:

40 to 80 days.

Leaf lettuce grows well in containers.

