



Plant Lettuce for a Fall Vegetable Garden

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Lettuce cultivars fall into 4 main categories:

Looseleaf lettuce, Butterhead lettuce, Romaine lettuce, and Crisphead lettuce



Looseleaf lettuce



Butterhead lettuce



Romaine lettuce



Crisphead lettuce

Lettuce is a great plant for the Fall vegetable garden, but it is also great to incorporate with ornamentals in your seasonal beds or in containers. Fall is known to be the best time to plant lettuce, but it can also be planted in early spring. Lettuce is a cool-season crop that grows best in 60 to 65° F temperatures, but can be grown at temps as low as 32° F and as warm as 80 to 90° F. With warmer temps in the early fall or as warmer temps approach late in spring the lettuce will begin to have a bitter flavor.

Most lettuces are established by direct seed or transplants and require a well-drained, moist soil with a pH of 6.5 to 6.8 and are sensitive to low pH (It is a good idea to add organic matter to the soil when planting). If no soil test is done, apply one and one-half cups of 8-8-8 fertilizer per 10 feet of row prior to planting. Sidedress with five teaspoons of ammonium nitrate per ten feet of row three weeks after planting. Mulch is a good idea to help retain moisture, but if applied too heavily, you may harbor snails that will feed on the lettuce---so mulch sparingly.

Plant leaf lettuce in rows one to two feet apart with seeds one-quarter inch deep and 10 to 20 seeds per foot in the row. Always thin leaf lettuce to six inches apart in the row when plants are two inches tall. For head lettuce it is best to grow from transplants and these should be planted in rows three feet apart with 12 inches between plants in the row. If there is danger of a late frost after planting, cover with a row cover to protect your lettuce. Below is a description of each type of lettuce that can be grown in this area along with general information and popular varieties.

Looseleaf lettuces are a good choice for gardens in Alabama. This lettuce is extremely easy and fast-growing with a maturity rate of 40 to 50 days and has a higher heat tolerance, but let the temperature lower before you harvest or the leaves will be bitter. Curly Oak Leaf and Royal Oak Leaf are two looseleaf lettuces you may want to plant. Included in looseleaf lettuce varieties are colored-leaf lettuces, such as: Red Sails (red leaves), Rouge Salad Bowl (red leaves) and Sierra lettuce (leaves are green with a red blush).

Aquarius and Buttercrunch are types of **butterhead lettuce** that have a loose heading cup-shaped dark green leaves and takes longer to mature at a rate of 55 to 70 days. At maturity, this lettuce forms a small head with a light yellow appearance.

Romaine lettuce is extremely easy to grow in Alabama and is popular in markets and has become one of the favorite lettuces for salads. This tall, upright-lettuce has a fast maturity rate and can grow 8 to 19 inches tall. Its leaves are long and loose and it is more tolerant of unfavorable weather conditions. Romaine lettuce is also referred to as Cos types, Paris Island Cos is a great variety to plant.

Crisphead lettuce is the most available lettuce seed cultivar called Iceberg and is commonly found in many garden centers. This lettuce will form a compact head with light green leaves and matures slowly at a rate of 80 to 100 days. For best growing results this type of lettuce should only be grown in the fall.