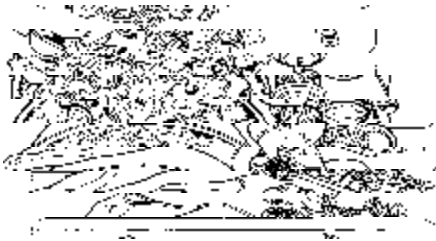


Purslane-this succulent weed is high in vitamins and become a pest in many gardens. Purslane has reddish stems and green, paddle-shaped leaves that are crunchy when eaten.



For more information and other helpful educational materials, contact:

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Green Tips

Plant and Grow Guides

Salad Greens (GT 116)

Some of the most popular vegetables grown in home gardens are the salad greens. One reason is that salads add color and variety to a meal. In addition, they have great nutritional value and are low in calories and are high in fiber and vitamins. Salads can include all kinds of vegetables and fruit, but many salads start with lettuce or other crispy, leafy greens which add taste and visual appeal. A crop of lettuce can be ready to harvest in as little as 6 to 10 weeks.



Common lettuce comes in three forms: loose-leaf lettuce, butter-head lettuce and head lettuce.

- Loose-leaf lettuce (or bunching) forms a rosette of tender leaves 8 to 12 inches across. Leaves are usually green, but some varieties have leaves that are dark green red or brown. Others have shapes like oak leaves.
- Butter-head lettuce (or Boston head) has a softly compressed head, about 8 to 12 inches across. The head consists of green outer leaves and pale green to yellow inner leaves and has a soft, buttery texture and a delicate flavor.
- Romaine lettuce (or cos) forms a vase-shaped, tightly compressed head of foliage about 10 inches tall. Leaves are coarse, crisp and more strongly flavored. It stores better than many other lettuces.
- Head lettuce (or crisphead) has green outer leaves the spread 12 to 15 inches across and form a tightly compressed pale green central ball.

It is widely sold in grocery stores. It is the most difficult to grow in home gardens. Temperatures must stay between 35 degrees at night and 80 degrees during the daytime for at least two months to grow this type of lettuce.

PLANTING

Lettuce does best as an early season or fall crop. Outside, it should be planted in full sun in the spring and fall. If it is grown during the summer, partial shade is preferred. Avoid the heat of summer unless the lettuce can be planted in partial shade.

Indoors

Starting lettuce seeds indoors has several advantages over directing sowing them into the garden. Seedlings avoid the hazards of being outdoors early in the spring when frost, birds or insects might be a problem. It also permits plants to be set out with correct spacing which eliminates the thinning process when the seeds are directly sown. Sow seeds five to eight weeks earlier than your frost-free date. Set out transplants as early as two to three weeks before the last frost. Seeds germinate and grow best in cooler conditions. High soil temperatures cause them to go dormant or bolt into producing seeds and becoming bitter.

In the Garden

Soil should be loosened and worked until there are no lumps or rocks because lettuce seeds are small. Sow seeds sparingly at a depth of ½ inch. Thin the seedlings for proper spacing. Keep the soil moist but do not wet the leaves any more than necessary. Loose-leaf lettuce matures in 6-7 weeks; butter-head in 9-10 weeks and head lettuce in 10-11 weeks after seeds are sown.

HARVESTING

Lettuce can be harvested at any time. When thinning lettuce, do not discard the pulled plants. Include the thinned lettuce in the evening's salad bowl. When lettuce plants are larger, you can extend the harvest time. Pick only the outside leaves on loose-leaf lettuces and allow the centers to continue to grow.

Other Salad Additions:

Endive and escarole-are members of the chicory family and have bitter leaves. Endive has curly, narrow leaves and escarole has broad leaves. To avoid the bitter taste, it is necessary to shield both endive and escarole from sunlight. When plants are well-formed and about 15 inches across, blanch the plants for two to three weeks. To blanch, gather the long outer leaves together over the crown of each plant and hold the leaves in place with a thin rubber band. Start the blanching process when the leaves are dry.

Seeds for both should be sown in mid summer, about 3 months before the first frost is due. Plants will tolerate frost and can also be started in early spring.

Radicchio (Red chicory)-is Italian in origin and resembles a small, loose-leaf head of maroon cabbage with white veins. It is mildly bitter and can be as an enhancement to other salad greens.

Garden cress-this annual herb can be eaten when small and has a peppery taste similar to watercress.



Chinese cabbage (Napa or Celery cabbage)-this cabbage relative has pale green and white crinkled leaves. It is grown as a fall crop.

Nasturtiums-these flower garden favorites can be tossed on top of salads to add color and taste appeal. They have a peppery-radish taste.

On the Wild Side:

Several plants that are usually considered to be weeds can join in the mixture of greens in the salad bowl. Why throw them away when weeding if they can be eaten?

Dandelion-pick tender, young leaves from plants that have not been exposed to weed killers or other contaminants. The leaves are mildly bitter.

Lamb's quarters-leaves taste like spinach and can also be cooked like spinach.