

# HOME & GARDEN

## A garden of greens for summer salads

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When I first began to garden, one of the things that pleased me most was the variety of vegetables I could grow. It wasn't just that I could grow leeks, collards, fennel and rutabagas; I mean I could plant different varieties of a single vegetable. For instance, lettuce is a summer staple and right now I have already planted black-seeded Simpson, Salad Bowl, Ruby and Buttercrunch. I still have Romaine, Butterking, Oakleaf and

### BETWEEN THE ROWS

Green Ice to put in. Giant summer salads are a delight to eat, not just a weight-watching duty, and a salad can become very special when it is made with a variety of greens. Black-seeded Simpson, Salad Bowl and Green Ice are all loosehead types — what we call leaf lettuce at my house. Loosehead lettuces can be planted very early and they are ready for harvest in about 45 days. These leaf lettuces are beautiful with their wavy leaves of differing shades of green from the tender green of black-seeded Simpson to the deeper Vitamin A rich leaves of Salad Bowl. (Nutrition is another reason for growing a variety of lettuces. Crisphead lettuce is not high in vitamins and that content is further diminished by supermarkets that remove the most nutritious outer leaves to create a neat head of blanched leaves.) I like throwing in the intensely shaded red leaves of Ruby lettuce for variety of color as well as taste and texture.

I chose Oakleaf and Green Ice because both are heat resistant so that even when a spell of hot summer weather causes the other looseheads to bolt and go to seed, they will still be tender and sweet.

The looseheads mature very quickly and to lengthen the season I also plant some butterhead types. These lettuces do form soft heads with thick, juicy leaves and while they have only half the amount of Vitamin A as some of the

looseheads, they are three times as rich as the crispheads like Iceberg. Because they are fragile and wilt easily, they are not often found in the supermarkets, but they are not difficult to grow in the garden and they make superior eating.

I chose Stokes Butterking which matures in 64 days and Burpee Buttercrunch which is ready to harvest in 75 days.

To extend the season still further I plant Romaine or Cos lettuce which can take 85 days to mature. The deep green elongated leaves with their crunchy midribs have a lot of body and substance.

All the lettuces require the same culture. They germinate best in the cool weather so they are among the first things to plant in the garden. If you want to start additional plantings during the summer, it is a good idea to start the seeds in flats in a cool place. I am fortunate to have a shady porch where I can keep seedlings until they are large enough and sturdy enough to stand being planted out in the garden.

When transplanting lettuce, be sure to water carefully and generously while the new plants are getting started. Adequate water is very important for good lettuce development and it is one crop that I do try to keep watered. One inch a week is ideal.

Lettuce is not a heavy feeder, but since it has a shallow root system, I prepare the planting bed well, digging in compost and rotted manure. I smooth the bed and spread seed that I have mixed with a little soil. By premixing the seeds with soil, you can assure better spacing of the fine seeds. Then I sprinkle soil over the seed, pat it down and water gently. Proper watering is always important and especially so for lettuce.

Another early, delicious and nutritious green to toss into a salad is spinach. Bloomsdale long standing is one of the first things I plant in the spring, using much the same method as I do for lettuce. However, the seeds are larger and easier to plant 3 or 4-inches apart. Like lettuce it matures in about 48 days and doesn't like the hot weather.



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