

GROWING LEAFY CROPS

Lettuce and many other leafy vegetables thrive in almost any soil but prefer a rich sandy loam or muck. Since leafy crops do best in cool weather, plant as early in the spring as the ground can be worked. Planting later than the end of April may lead to premature flowers instead of a good crop of leaves. Resume planting in late July through August for a fall harvest. When planting, apply 3 cups of a 5-10-10 fertilizer of similar analysis for every 50 feet of row prior to planting the seed. Plant seeds about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep, 16 Inch apart with 18 inches between rows. Provide plenty of moisture early. Sow successive crops at 10 day intervals to ensure continuous harvest.

Thinning is essential to raising good greens. First, thin when the plants are 2 inches tall, spacing plants 2 inches apart. When the plants appear crowded again, thin 8 to 12 inches apart.

Loose leaf lettuce is sweet tasting with large, delicate, ruffled leaves in shades of green and red. Recommended varieties include Crispy Sweet which matures in 40 days and the red-leafed Ruby, maturing in 45 days. Romaine lettuce is a strong, but sweet tasting plant with heavy ribs running the length of the leaves. A good romaine variety is Parris Island Cos, maturing in 70 days from seeding.

Butterhead and Bibb lettuce tolerate moderately warm growing conditions but do best in cool weather. Butterhead is a light green to yellow with a delicate, sweet flavor. Bibb lettuce has tiny, open, cupped shaped heads of dark green leaves and a mild, delicate sweet flavor. The varieties Buttercrunch and Summer Bibb both mature in around 62 days.

Iceberg lettuce, the major type for retail stores, is difficult to grow; often forming seed stalks rather than heads. Two recommended varieties are Fulton and Ithaca, both maturing in about 85 days.

Pungent tasting endive is excellent mixed with milder tasting greens. The variety Green Curled matures in 95 days. Spinach is excellent raw and cooked. Two basic varieties are available, smooth-leaf and savoy, which has crinkled leaves. The best varieties are Bloomsdale Long Standing, maturing in 48 days and Indian Summer, maturing in 39 days. If you wish to grow spinach in summer try the heat tolerant New Zealand spinach which

matures in 70 days.

Swiss Chard is very closely related to beets and is in the same family as spinach. It also tolerates hot summer weather. Swiss chard plants a "bright lights with a rainbow of colorful stalks". The leaves are tasty in salads and the thick stalks may be cooked and eaten like asparagus. Good varieties are Rhubarb Chard with red stalks and Ford hook Giant, both maturing in 60 days.

MSU Extension - Rhubarb Fact Sheet

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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