

Salad Greens: Grow a Small Patch You Can Keep Picking

Start with a patch you can harvest for one meal. A short row planted at the right time is more useful than a whole bed that bolts before you eat it.

Choose your harvest

Loose-leaf lettuce suits frequent small harvests. Head lettuce needs space and time to form a head. Try one lettuce variety first and label the sowing date; add another only after you know how quickly your household uses the crop.

Match the weather

Lettuce prefers cool conditions. Use your local extension planting calendar and the seed packet to choose a spring or fall window. In a hot spell, postpone another sowing rather than assuming extra water will prevent bolting. For fall, allow for slower growth as days shorten; the packet's maturity estimate is not a guaranteed harvest date.

Sow a manageable amount

Choose a sunny, accessible spot with drainage. Prepare a fine seedbed, sow shallowly at the packet's depth and water gently. Keep the surface from drying while seeds germinate. Thin to the packet's final spacing; crowded seedlings compete even when they look productive. Containers need drainage holes and a potting mix intended for containers.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Use a three-row plan

Label three short rows A, B and C. Sow A first. About a week or two later, sow B if conditions still suit lettuce. Sow C after that. This is a starting experiment, not a fixed calendar: record how much you actually pick and adjust the next row's size. When a row bolts or becomes bitter, replace it rather than repeatedly trimming an exhausted crop.

Pick, inspect, repeat

For leaf lettuce, take usable outer leaves while leaving the growing center intact. Inspect leaf undersides and the soil surface when harvesting. Holes alone do not identify the pest; look for the insect or slug before choosing a treatment. Water the root zone as needed, checking the soil rather than watering automatically on a timer.

Your first-week checklist

Choose leaf or head lettuce; find your local planting window; label one short row; record the variety and sowing date; check moisture daily during emergence. Keep a note of meals harvested, not just days since planting.

Your next step

What will you do first? Write one action and a date, then record what happened.

Action: _____

Date: _____ Result: _____

Sources and more guides

[University of Maryland: Growing lettuce](#)

[University of Minnesota: Fall planting](#)

[University of Maryland: Container vegetables](#)

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Use local planting guidance and the variety instructions for your conditions. This is an editorial planning guide from Best Garden Channel.