

HOW TO GROW LETTUCE FROM SEED & WHEN TO PLANT

BY [AMY ANDRYCHOWICZ](#) | [26 COMMENTS](#)

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Growing lettuce from seed is simple, and so rewarding. In this post, I will show you exactly when and how to plant lettuce seeds for the best results.



Growing lettuce seeds is so much cheaper and far easier than you might think. Once you get good at it, you'll never go back to buying starts again.

Planting lettuce seeds is fairly straightforward. But, there are different methods you can use, and some important things to keep in mind in order to end up with healthy seedlings.

If you want to be really successful, this guide will show you the best system to use, and walk you through everything you need to know about how to grow lettuce from seed, step by step.

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ABOUT AMY ANDRYCHOWICZ

I'm an author and expert gardener who loves growing ALL of the plants. From vegetables, herbs, and flowers to cacti, succulents, tropicals, and houseplants - you name it, I've grown it! My green thumb comes from my parents, and I've been gardening for most of my life. [Read More...](#)

There are tons of varieties of lettuce seeds you can grow. I like to plant several different types so I

COMMENTS

Leigh Mann says

I'm so worried! We are in early spring but get summer fast! How do I care lettuce them in 106 degrees? Move them to more shade or wait until fall when they regrow? Newbie here. We wanna go after our expected last snow fall.

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Since it gets so hot where you live, lettuce should definitely be a fall and winter crop for you. They hate the heat and grow best in cooler weather, and can even withstand frost. You can try planting it in the spring, but definitely give it shade and mulch the soil to help keep it cool. You might be able to get a crop or two before it bolts.

REPLY

Barbara says

Hi! Great article. I started lettuce seeds indoors and then some outdoors. I'm having a problem with them being leggy. They literally got leggy in one day when they broke thru the soil. Is it ok to plant it deeper so the leaves will be at the soil level or do you have a suggestion? Thanks!

The method you choose depends on what is most convenient for you, and where you live. If it's too hot or cold to direct sow them, then your best option is to start them indoors.

Related Post: [3 Seed Starting Methods That Every Gardener Should Try](#)

HOW LONG FROM SEED TO HARVEST?

Lettuce seeds grow very quickly. On average, it only takes about 40-50 days for them to reach full maturity.

You can start harvesting leafy varieties much sooner than that, since they don't need to reach full maturity first.

However, larger types, or those that produce a head, need longer to mature. It can take anywhere from 55-80 days from seed to harvest for iceberg, romaine, or bibb lettuce, for example.



Mature leaf lettuce ready to harvest

PLANTING LETTUCE SEEDS

Sowing lettuce seeds takes a little bit of planning. Don't just throw them into the garden and hope for the best. Set yourself up for success by planting them the right way, and at the proper time.

WHEN TO PLANT LETTUCE SEEDS

Lettuce seeds germinate best in the cooler temperatures of spring or fall. If it's too hot, they won't germinate.

So, the best time to plant lettuce seeds is as soon as the ground is workable in very early spring, or once the temps start to cool down in late summer or early fall.

LETTUCE SEEDS GERMINATION TIME

In general, it takes somewhere between 4-10 days for lettuce seeds to germinate. In perfect conditions, it can be as little as 2 days.

If the soil is too warm, dry, or wet, or if there's no light, it will inhibit germination. So, if your lettuce seeds aren't growing, then check the temperature, light, and moisture levels.

WHAT DO LETTUCE SEEDLINGS LOOK LIKE?

When they first sprout, lettuce seedlings are very small, and have two rounded and slightly oblong shaped leaves. Those are called the "seed leaves".

All of the ones that form after that are called the "true leaves", and they look exactly like the mature ones – only much tinier.



HOW TO CARE FOR LETTUCE SEEDLINGS

Once your lettuce seedlings have germinated, they still need extra care. Here is what to do to ensure success after they sprout.

LIGHT

In order to germinate and grow their best, lettuce seeds and seedlings need lots of bright light. So make sure to use a [grow light](#) indoors to ensure they stay compact.

WATER

They will also do best in consistently moist soil. Never allow it to dry out or become too soggy. A [moisture gauge](#) is the perfect tool to help you get it just right.

FERTILIZER

Once your baby lettuce seedlings form their first true leaves, you can start feeding them with a half strength dose of [organic seedling fertilizer](#), liquid [fish emulsion](#), or [compost tea](#).

THINNING

If you end up with overcrowded lettuce seedlings, then you should [thin them](#) to give each one plenty of room, especially head varieties.

Otherwise they will compete for light, water, and nutrients, and end up crowding each other out. Which means you'll have leggy plants that produce very little.





First true leaves on lettuce seedlings

TRANSPLANTING LETTUCE SEEDLINGS INTO THE GARDEN

If you started your lettuce seeds indoors, then there are a few steps you must take in order for them to survive being transplanted into the garden.

First, make sure that you **harden them off** to prepare them for life outdoors, and never skip this step. Otherwise, the transplant shock could be fatal.

Also, it's very important to transplant them at the right time. Lettuce seedlings hate the heat, and hot weather will trigger bolting.

So plant them into the garden as soon as the soil is workable in very early spring, or after your last heatwave in early fall.



Baby lettuce seedlings in my garden

FAQS ABOUT GROWING LETTUCE SEEDS

You are probably feeling pretty confident about growing lettuce from seed by now. But you might still have some questions. Here are answers to the ones I get the most.

WHY WON'T MY LETTUCE SEEDS GERMINATE?

If your lettuce seeds don't germinate, they are most likely old. Otherwise, you may have planted them too deep, or the soil is too warm, too wet, or too dry.

HOW MANY LETTUCE SEEDS DO YOU PLANT PER HOLE?

How many lettuce seeds to plant per hole depends on their age. If they're new, then plant one per hole. Otherwise, if they're more than two years old, plant 2-3 per hole, then thin them out later if necessary.

HOW DEEP DO YOU PLANT LETTUCE SEEDS?

You don't need to plant lettuce seeds very deep. Since they are so small, and require light to germinate, you should plant them only about 1/4 inch deep.

SHOULD I SOAK LETTUCE SEEDS BEFORE PLANTING?

While it's certainly not required, soaking lettuce seeds for 12-24 hours before planting can help to speed up germination.

HOW CAN YOU GERMINATE LETTUCE SEEDS FASTER?

To germinate lettuce seeds faster, try soaking them for 12-24 hours before planting. Also, keep the soil cool, and give them plenty of light right from the start.

DO LETTUCE SEEDS NEED LIGHT TO GERMINATE?

Yes, lettuce seeds need light to germinate, so make sure that you don't sow them too deep. Then put them in a bright location during germination, or hang a [plant light](#) right above the trays.

Growing lettuce from seed is fun, and very easy. Simply follow the detailed instructions above for the best success, and the biggest bounty!

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Would you like to learn how to finally be successful with growing your own seeds? Then you should take my [online Seed Starting Course](#)! It's a fantastic and fully comprehensive online course that you go through at your own pace. [Enroll and begin today!](#)

Otherwise, if you just need a little refresher, then you should download my [Starting Seeds Indoors eBook](#) for the perfect quick start guide.

Up Next: [Learn exactly how to care for your lettuce plants here.](#)

MORE POSTS ABOUT GROWING SEEDS

- [How To Plant & Grow Carrots From Seed](#)
- [How To Plant & Grow Radishes From Seed](#)
- [How To Grow An Avocado Tree From Seed](#)
- [How To Grow Spinach From Seed: Step-By-Step](#)

Share your tips for planting lettuce seeds in the comments below.



Step-By-Step Guide



STEPS FOR PLANTING LETTUCE SEEDS

Below I will walk you through the steps for how to plant lettuce seeds. Before you begin, gather all of your supplies so you have everything you need to hand. This will make the sowing process much easier and faster.

HOW TO PLANT LETTUCE SEEDS

It's easy to plant lettuce seeds indoors or outside. Simply follow these step-by-step instructions.



MATERIALS

PRINT

- [Lettuce seeds](#)
- Water
- [Seedling trays \(optional\)](#)
- [Seed starting soil \(optional\)](#)
- [OR peat pellets \(optional\)](#)

TOOLS

- [Hand trowel](#)
- [Grow light \(optional\)](#)
- Soil thermometer (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prepare the soil or pellets** - Indoors, pre-moisten the [potting mix](#) or [peat pellets](#) before planting in [plastic trays](#). Outdoors, use your [garden trowel](#) to loosen the top inch of soil, and remove any weeds or large rocks and sticks before sowing.
2. **Determine how many seeds to plant** - Outside, sow the seeds in rows 12-18" apart. Indoors, plant one per hole for fresh seeds, or 2-3 per hole if they're old.



3. **Plant the seeds** - Sprinkle the seeds over the top of the garden soil or indoor trays, or plant them no more than 1/4" deep.



4. **Water the soil** - Use the lowest setting on your garden hose outdoors, or water the indoor trays from the bottom. Water them well until the soil is evenly moist, but not soggy.
5. **Cover the seed flats (optional)** - If you started them indoors, cover the trays with the [plastic humidity lid](#).
6. **Indoors monitor light and temperature** - Put the trays in a bright location, or add a [grow light](#). Use a [soil thermometer](#) to ensure the temperature stays between 65-75°F.

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REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Lettuce seedlings grow very fast once the seeds germinate, so it's important to put a grow light on them as soon as they pop out of the soil. That's the only way to keep them from getting leggy indoors. If they're getting leggy outdoors, then you should plant them in a location where they'll get more direct sunlight. Here's an article that will help... [How and when to use grow lights for seedlings](#).

REPLY

Pauline says

The last two years my all year round lettuce seeds have failed to grow, I start in my green house and use a good compost which I buy from the local garden center. Normally I have had no trouble in the past with growing these seeds, What could I be doing wrong.

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

When lettuce seeds won't grow, it can be caused by a few different things... They may be too old, and no longer viable. The soil may be too warm or too wet. They also need light in order to germinate, so make sure you're not planting them too deep, and give them plenty of light right from the start. Also, I would try using a seed starting mix, rather than one that contains compost, as it may be too heavy or hold too much water.

REPLY

Rich says

Dear Amy.

We are trying to grow lettuce in the kitchen window in pots. We used a plastic spray bottle to wet the surface well when the seeds were in, and then when the soil dried out re-did it. However, once the seedlings were growing we noticed that the soil was dry from about 2cm down. We put some pots in a water bath so the soil could suck up the water. However, many plants are dying and we are not sure whether it's too little or too much water or something else.

Your advice would be greatly appreciated, Thank you for your time.

Rich

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Yes, lettuce definitely doesn't like dry soil. So, keep it evenly moist, but be careful not to overwater it – the soil should never be soggy. If the seedlings are dying after you soaked the soil, then they may have been overwatered. Also, be sure they have enough light, they need lots of bright light. Keep them near a sunny window, or add a grow light. One other thing that can cause them to die off is seedling blight, which happens when you don't **properly clean your trays**. Hope this helps you figure it out. Good luck!

REPLY

Bobbie Yvette Welch says

I have not yet grown anything. But, this year I started my garden, and have included Lettuce, Tomatoes, Basil, Cilantro, Watermelon and a Lemon Tree so far. They are still in the starter phase, and I must say so far so good. So, I am very happy that I came across your website, so that I can get more helpful hints.

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Sounds like a great start! Good luck, I hope everything will grow well for you!

REPLY

Linda says

I tried this last year and had great results. I also tried taking the bottom you cut off and throw away, putting that in water. When it has new starts on it plant it. This worked great. Some of my lettuce from last year has restarted in the garden this year.

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says
Awesome!

REPLY

Ashley says

We planted our first lettuce seeds the other day. This will be our first time growing it and we can't wait. We eat salad almost everyday in the summer so its going to be nice to not run to the store for it. 😊

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says
Yes, me too! My seeds are sprouting, and I can't wait until they're big enough to eat!! I eat salads every day in the summer too. 😊

REPLY

Lauren says

Love this!! Would love to try planting some lettuce this spring! My garden has southern exposure. I wonder if I should try to create some shade somehow for the lettuce!

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

I start my lettuce seeds really early (as soon as the soil is ready to be worked in the spring) so they have plenty of time to grow and produce before the heat of summer sets in. If it's too late for that this year, then yes, I would put them in a shadier spot. You can tuck them into raised beds next to or under other vegetables that are fast growing and can provide shade as the sun gets hotter (like beans, squash and cucumbers). Then as those warm weather plants start to take over, your lettuce will be done anyway.

REPLY

Tom says

I really like lettuce because it's quick and easy to grow like you said and works well in pots. Plus, I have two small girls ages 3 and 5 and for whatever reason (I know this is insane) but if we "Grow" something as a family they will eat it. If we buy it from the store, it's a different ball game. Anything to get my kids to eat healthy.

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Yes! Kids eat what they grow, so keep on gardening with them. Love it! P.S. Kids especially love stuff that is fast and easy to grow from seed, like lettuce!



REPLY

Anna says

This is a fantastic article on something that surprisingly not a lot of folks know! With is interesting given the demand for very fresh and high quality food.

Another great thing about growing your own lettuce from seed is you get to try some really neat varieties that you won't find anywhere else. Lettuce comes in so many forms, shapes, colors, textures, and flavors- it's quite amazing what we miss out on if we stick to store-bought lettuce.

I've grown lettuce in all sorts of containers. I've even grown it in my kitchen under a simple daylight spectrum compact fluorescent bulb in a lamp. I do herbs this way too. It's the only way I've tried that works for getting fresh lettuce (and herbs) during our winters here in Minnesota.

Great post Amy, as always!

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Thanks! I love that you grow lettuce through the winter in Minnesota! I need to try that sometime.

REPLY

Molls says

I grew my own lettuce this spring for the first time. The good news is, it was awesome. The bad news is, I can no longer tolerate storebought. I am saving seeds from my plants and I want to try to grow year round. You mentioned growing in pots in kitchen? I've wondered if those hydroponic growing systems are worth the hype. I just want fresh lettuce all the time! Thanks for your post.

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Yes I agree, it's hard to settle for store-bought once you realize how easy (and delicious) it is to grow lettuce from seed. I've never tried doing it hydroponically myself, but I know lots of people have great success with it.

Amy says

Wow!

It looks like it is coming along just nicely!

I first grew lettuce as part of a school project when I was younger, then last year I decided to do it again and I can tell you something, I have NEVER tasted anything like it!

Lettuce tastes 100% better when home-grown.

Great Post- I love it! Thanks for sharing!

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Yes, I totally agree! I miss my garden fresh lettuce through the winter, and crave it! Glad you decided to grow it again, now you'll be hooked! 😊

REPLY

Naomi says

Isn't lettuce a great plant! My husband tasted fresh garden lettuce for the first time last year and then during the winter he wouldn't eat the store bought stuff because he said it had no taste! I'm thinking that I'm going to try and rig up some plastic and hoops to make one of those mini green houses over part of my garden so that I can continue to grow lettuce and other greens over the winter.

Lettuce is such a great beginner plant because as you said there really is nothing to it except to toss the seeds on the soil. Absolutely love it. Last year I was prego and didn't have a whole lot of energy so the lettuce I planted bolted early...but now I've got lots of little lettuce seedlings popping up all over my yard. Now I just need to dig them up and put them in my garden so they don't get run over by the lawn mower!

REPLY

Amy Andrychowicz says

Yes, I love it too. I am like your husband and hate getting lettuce from the store during the winter!! I wish I could grow it year round under a hoop, that would be awesome! Have fun if you decide to give it a try.

REPLY

LEAVE A REPLY

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Comment *