



Design for Everyday Living

growing head lettuce

Head lettuce is a wonderful green vegetable that should be in every home garden in the spring. It should not replace leaf lettuce, however, but be an addition to it.

VARIETY

Great Lakes Mesa is the best variety for West Virginia conditions.

SOIL

If head lettuce is to develop properly it must grow rapidly; therefore, the soil must be fertile. Choose a piece of ground that is high in organic matter and fertilize it well by working into the soil about 4 pounds of 5-10-10 fertilizer for each 100 square feet of area. This is roughly 1 ton per acre. If you are planning to produce one-half acre or more of lettuce it would be wise to plow down a fairly new sod, preferably clover, in order to eliminate the weed problem. Any manure to be added should be applied to the sod the year before.

SOWING SEED OR SETTING PLANTS

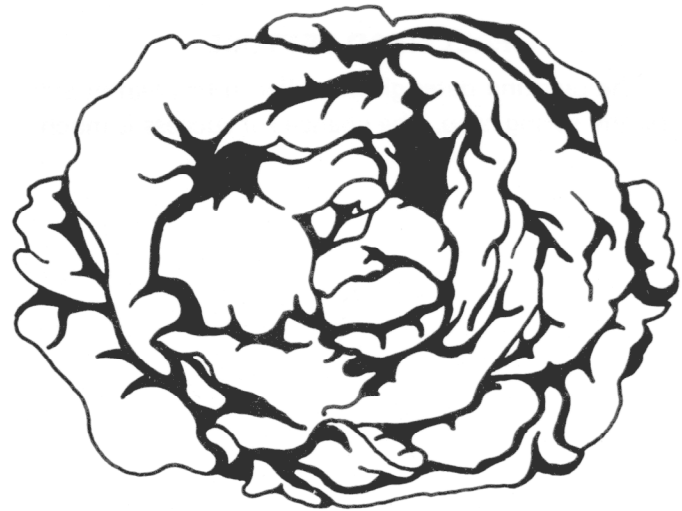
You can produce head lettuce successfully by either sowing the seed directly where they are to grow and thin, or by setting started plants.

Sow the seed as soon after March 1 as the weather will permit. Sow in rows about 30 inches apart. Make sure that the seed is just barely covered. Just as soon as the plants can be pulled, thin them so that they will stand 15 inches apart in the row.

If plants are used they should be set in the open about the last week of March. The plants should be about six weeks of age. Set the plants 15 inches apart in the row and have the rows 30 inches apart.

PEST CONTROL

Three field diseases may cause losses to head lettuce in West Virginia. The most prevalent of these diseases is called "yellows." It is caused by a



virus, often found in a number of ordinary weeds, and carried from the weeds to head lettuce by the aster leaf hopper (*Macrostelus fascifrons*). The other two diseases are referred to by the common names of "bottom-rot" and "drop."

Yellows – The following control practices are recommended:

1. Isolate or surround the head lettuce planting with other, clean-cultivated crops.
2. Do not plant head lettuce next to fence rows, pastures, hay or grains, or unsprayed flowers and vegetables.

Bottom-rot and Drop

1. Avoid mounding the soil around the plants when transplanting. The soil surface should be level under the plants to provide for good air movement.

NITRATE

Head lettuce requires a continuous supply of available nitrogen. To have this material present as needed, two or three side-dressings of nitrate of soda should be made. Make the first application when the direct-seeded lettuce is thinned to one plant each 15 inches. On the lettuce from plants, apply about two weeks after the plants have been set in the field. Make second application two weeks after the first and the third about two weeks after

the second application. A good application is about 150 pounds of nitrate of soda per acre or one level tablespoonful per plant. Make the application on top of the ground out about 3 inches from the plant. This material will burn the plant if it remains in contact with it.

CULTIVATION

Cultivate only to control weeds and then be sure not to dig or plow deeper than 1 inch because lettuce has a large number of very shallow roots.

FALL HEAD LETTUCE

The planting dates given earlier in this leaflet are for the spring crop. The chance for success is much

better for the early spring crop which will mature by June 15 or before. Head lettuce that should mature in late June or July will usually fail to do so because of the hot weather. Many gardeners – particularly those who live in the higher altitudes where the summer rainfall is plentiful–will have good success with fall head lettuce. Lettuce for fall heading should be seeded in the garden about July 1. Fertilize and nitrate this lettuce just the same as for the spring crop.

Chemicals to control the aster leaf hopper may be available. Consult your County Agent for current recommendations.

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