

Lettuce

History

Lettuce originated in the Mediterranean area and was first grown as a weed. The first documentation of cultivation begins in Ancient Egypt over 6,000 years ago, but it may have been cultivated in the Middle East prior to this. Ancient Egyptian artwork, especially tomb paintings, depicts different varieties of lettuce.

Ancient Greeks and Romans also cultivated lettuce. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, would praise lettuce to his fellow Grecians. It is said that the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus valued lettuce so much that he had a statue of lettuce made.

Lettuce spread throughout Europe. On Columbus' second journey to the Americas, he brought lettuce seeds to plant. Lettuce cultivation began in the United States in the 1600s when John Winthrop Jr. brought lettuce seeds to America from England.

Varieties

Iceberg lettuce is the least nutritious of the salad greens. It has a pale green color and looks similar to cabbage because of its tightly packed leaves that form a head. It was originally called "crisphead lettuce," but was renamed in the 1920s.

Romaine lettuce is loaf-shaped and has dark outer leaves with strong taste and crisp texture. This lettuce was grown by the Romans, which gives it the name "romaine." In Europe it is called "cos lettuce" - named after the Greek island Kos in the Aegean Sea where it was grown.

Leaf lettuce is lettuce with leaves that form in a loose bunch rather than a tight head. The leaves are typically crisper and more flavorful than head lettuce.



Fun Facts

- Lettuce is a member of the sunflower family.
- On average, each American eats 30 pounds of lettuce every year.
- Most lettuce sold in the US is grown in California.
- Lettuce leaves that are darker in color contain more vitamins and minerals than the paler color varieties.
- Lettuce is harvested by hand.



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