



The Big Lettuce Laugh

By Sandra Ferry



WHAT'S IN A LETTUCE?

The way most of us see lettuces is as a colourful, decorative, constituent of a salad but there is much more to lettuce than as an artistic garnish.

Lettuces are well known to be low in calories which is why they are beloved of those on diets but lettuces are also a very good source of Vitamins A, B and C; minerals such as iron for red blood cells, calcium for bones, magnesium for muscles, the brain and nerves and potassium to control the heart rate and blood pressure.

Lettuce is also an aid to digestion. It is recommended for those suffering from insomnia. It keeps the liver healthy and is a good antioxidant.

The greener the lettuce leaves, the more nutrients they contain, the Cos varieties being the best.

WHAT PRICE??

A lettuce from a supermarket will probably cost about £1.00 for a single lettuce or for two "Little Gem" lettuces in a bag. Even the cheaper retailers charge around £0.60 for a simple round lettuce. These prices of course include the payment to the growers and their own costs but *you* can have this wonder food for as little as **£0.001** for each lettuce!

GROW YOUR OWN!

Lettuce is one of the easiest plants to grow. A packet of seeds costs, between 50p and £2.00 depending on the variety and seed seller. Packets usually contain about 1000 seeds and they will probably all germinate!



To grow outside (if you have the space) dig and rake the soil into a fine tilth, sow the seed in rows 10in (25 cm) apart and cover with $\frac{1}{2}$ in (1.5cm) of fine soil. When the leaves are large enough, thin the plants out to 6in (15cm) apart. Keep them moist and free from weeds.



BUT you don't need a greenhouse or a lot of land to grow lettuces. Sift some compost into a seed tray and water lightly. Sow the seeds thinly over the surface and cover with a little more compost and put the trays on a window ledge. The seeds will germinate in 7 - 14 days.

When the seedlings are big enough, plant them outside in pots or other decorative containers. Put them in a sheltered spot which does not get too much sun and keep them watered. Pick the lettuces as and when required or depending on the variety, pick individual leaves as "cut and come again".



The art of lettuce-growing is to sow a few seeds every 2 to 3 weeks to produce continuous crops. "*Little Gem*" lettuce is easy to grow and very useful if there is not much space available. For a colourful salad, try the *Cos* variety "*Marshall*" brilliant red in colour or "*Red Salad Bowl*". You can sow "*Mixed Salad Leaves*" from March to July to harvest from April to October. You can sow "*Winter Density*" outside from April to September to harvest from January to July. "*Little Gem*" can be sown from March to July and harvested from May to October.

Home-grown lettuce stores better and you know that they are free from pesticides!
Have a go. See how many lettuces you can grow for very little cost
...and YOU have the last laugh!