

Cultural Details: **Lettuce (Outdoor)**

Introduction

Season of production for outdoor lettuce can, with choice of modern varieties, be extensive in favourable areas. Key factors for intensive production are - medium fertile soils, some protection from winds, and availability of irrigation facilities. Peat blocking/sowing machines and planters will be of importance for intensive production. Moles Seeds offer a selection of butterhead, crisp, loose-leaved (frilly-leaved) and cos types, as listed in the catalogue.

Soil preparation

Lettuce respond well to fertile soil conditions, so farmyard manure can be used at up to 50 tonnes per hectare, Soil index 2-3 for N, P, K should be aimed at, applying extra Magnesium as necessary. Aim for a pH of 6.5-7 (6.0 on peaty soils).

Programming

As an example, for a long-season variety, sow from March at 3-weekly intervals, into blocks or direct, until the end of July. Direct sow spacing is 7.5-10cm, thinned to 30-35cm, by 30-35cm. Harvest June-October.

Optimum germination temperature is 13-16°C. A growing room can be used, for seed sown into trays then planed into blocks, or direct-sown into blocks. Plants are placed under continuous light once germinated, are fed and watered regularly, and should be ready for planting in about 4 weeks. This allows production of young plants to a schedule, regardless of external conditions. CO₂ enrichment of growing rooms may also improve growth.

The young plants are planted up into a bed, 5-6 rows wide. As the plants are shallow-rooted, care must be taken to ensure the plants are adequately watered, but not over-watered as root damage/fungal attack will be encouraged.

Common pests and diseases

Aphids - several species cause crop damage, either directly by leaf distortion or contamination, or indirectly by spreading viral disorders.

Cutworms (generally Turnip Moth caterpillars) damage plants by cutting through and damaging or severing the stems of young lettuce.

Slugs may be a problem especially in warm, moist conditions.

Downy Mildew (bremisia) can be detected by the presence of pale, angular marks on older leaves. Whitish spores can be visible under the leaves, patches bordered by the leaf veins. Choose resistant varieties.

Botrytis (Grey Mould) can cause total collapse of the plant, with dead or dying tissue becoming covered in the characteristic grey spores.

Monitor the crop closely for signs of attack, and treat with a suitable chemical, according to the manufacturers' recommendations.