

PLOUGH TO THE PLATE

If you don't know the difference between the Romaine and the butternut be cos you're not too familiar with all the different lettuces on offer, then don't despair we are here to ResQ you...

C.D Warner once said that "Lettuce is like conversation: It must be fresh and crisp, and so sparkling that you scarcely notice the bitter in it."

So read on and arm yourself with some fantastic banter about the different leaves that can be ploughed straight from the ground and onto your plate in just a few minutes i.e. if you grow your own!

Leaf guide

The beauty of salads is that whether you're looking for sweet, soft, subtle, or bitter flavours, there are many different tastes and textures which make a tasty meal on their own, or which can provide a wonderful foundation to a range of interesting ingredients.

But if you don't know your red chard from your romaine, then this guide is here to help you. There are hundreds of different cultivars within each variety, but this list will help you identify the main types.



COS and Romaine (Red/Green)

Cos, or romaine lettuces as they are also known, have a long, oval head of tightly packed crisp leaves. They are rich in potassium and also contain carotenoids. They are the perfect and traditional base for Caesar salads.

Cos is so called as it is thought it originated on the Greek Island of the same name (Kos).



Iceberg

A pale, round, tightly packed lettuce which has crisp leaves with a refreshing flavour. British Iceberg lettuce is available from May through to October and reaches the stores less than 24 hours

after picking. It stays fresh longer than any other type of lettuce, if kept at a constant cool temperature



Round Lettuce

The traditional 'British lettuce' the round lettuce has soft mid-green outer leaves and a slightly crisper, paler heart.



Little gem Lettuce

A smaller, compact variety of cos lettuce. The rich, outer leaves and delicate inner leaves are crisp, with a sweet flavour. Simply halve or quarter the spear-shaped heads lengthways or separate into individual leaves.



Radicchio

A striking red and white chicory with a slightly bitter flavour

SPECIALITY AND BABY LEAF (LOOSE LEAVES)



Lollo Rosso lettuce

A non-heading loose-leaf lettuce, Lollo Rosso has fringed and crinkled leaves that are tinged deep red at their ends, with a fairly tender, yet crisp texture. The depth of colour varies with each variety. It contains the antioxidant quercetin, which is believed to reduce the risk of heart disease.



Oak Leaf lettuce (Red/Green)

Another loose-leaf lettuce, Oak leaf has very attractive serrated, deep-green leaves sometimes tinged with red.



Red Chard

Red Chard is a member of the Swiss Chard family and is also available with many other stem colours. The name chard actually refers to the broad middle stalks and the side ribs rather than the leafy part of the plant. Ideal for brightening up salads, red chard has a distinct flavour and, when young, can be treated like spinach and eaten raw or cooked.



Frisee Endive

This is a spiky firm textured leaf, which is mildly bitter with a slight grainy texture. Also known as curly endive, frisee is a form of chicory, and belongs to the Compositae or daisy family. Traditionally this is combined with poached eggs and bacon in the classic French bistro salad and, mixed with other leaves, provides a great and robust bed for a variety of hot ingredients.



Escarole

A broad leaved kind of frisee, this has crunchy, mild green outer leaves and a pale heart. The flavour is slightly bitter, but less so than frisee. It is good mixed with milder salad leaves.



Gourmet Medley

If you want a mixed salad all in one lettuce, then Gourmet Medley's the one for you. Lollo Rosso (slightly nutty), Lollo Biondi (mild and tender) and Red Oak Leaf (mild and sweet) are grown tightly together in one root ball and then cut and sold as a three headed lettuce.

Batavia

Batavia lettuce is a non-heartly lettuce with frilly leaves. Its crunchy nutty flavoured leaves grow upright to form a loose leaf head. Batavias have an excellent shelf life, maintaining their crispness from the time they're harvested until the time they reach the dinner table.

Lollo Verde

A light green frilly leafed lettuce with a delicate texture and a mild flavour

Bulls blood (Ruby Red Chard)

A young tender leaf with a bright red stalk and deep red leaf. A mild delicate beetroot flavour.

Mizuna

Light green serrated leaves with a soft texture and mild mustard flavour

**Spinach**

Young spinach leaves are tender and sweet and are delicious raw or cooked. Eating raw spinach, such as in a salad, minimises the loss of nutrients, which occurs during cooking. Thought to originate from the Mediterranean, spinach is a member of the goosefoot family, which also includes Swiss chard, table beet and leaf beet. The fresh, leafy taste is especially delicious with egg, tomato and lentil dishes.

**Rocket**

Thought to originate from southern Europe, rocket is very versatile and great served cold in salads, wilted in pasta or on top of a pizza. Also known as arugula, rucola and roquette, this thin spiky leaf has a strong peppery flavour and has long had a role in Italian cookery. Dioscorides (40-90AD), the Greek physician and pharmacologist, described the leaf as 'a digestive and good for ye belly'. It also contains compounds called Glucosinolates which are believed to have a possible protective role against certain types of cancers.

**Watercress**

A member of the Cruciferae family, watercress has a distinctive 'raw' flavour, both peppery and slightly pungent. Watercress is the UK's most historic salad leaf and, unlike other salad leaves, is grown in gravel beds, washed by flowing mineral rich spring water. The ancient Greeks called watercress kardamon and believed it could brighten their intellect, hence their proverb "Eat watercress and get wit". The leaf is popularly eaten in soup and salads, as well as frequently featuring as an ingredient in detox juices.



Tatsoi

A true brassica, tatsoi is a form of Chinese flat cabbage. Lustrous dark green leaves have a delicate mustard flavour with a crunchy but succulent and juicy stalk. In the same family as Pak Choi, this Asian green is delicious sautéed with a little sesame oil or slightly wilted in stir fries.

And if you are into pub quizzes, then arm yourself with these interesting facts and folklore:-

Facts & folklore



- ❖ Lettuce has been an important part of our diet since ancient times. Its history stretched back over 6,000 years to the time of the Sumerians, the first known civilisation who lived in what we know as southern Iraq.
- ❖ It is believed that the Romans introduced lettuce to Britain and guess who brought it to Ireland?
- ❖ It was customary for the Romans to precede their gargantuan banquets with refreshing lettuce salads in the belief that lettuce enhanced the appetite and relaxed the alimentary canal.
- ❖ Dried lettuce juice was used to aid sleep in Elizabethan times.
- ❖ Through World War II lactucarium, a sedative made from wild lettuce extracts was used in hospitals.
- ❖ Lettuce was first eaten by the ancient kings of Persia 2,500 years ago.
- ❖ The lettuce we see today actually started out as a weed around the Mediterranean basin.
- ❖ Christopher Columbus introduced lettuce to the new world and from there lettuce in the United States went into cultivation.
- ❖ Iceberg was given its name as a result of the leaf being developed in America and being packed with ice

so as to survive transportation in warm temperatures.

- ❖ The 17th century horticulturist, John Evelyn, introduced the vegetable to England.
- ❖ The first supplies of Iceberg lettuce arrived on British shores in the mid 1970's from the USA where it was developed, but it was not until 1984 that British growers truly mastered its growing techniques.
- ❖ Salad comes from the Latin word "herba salta" or "salted herbs," so called because such greens were usually seasoned with dressings containing lots of salt.
- ❖ Leonardo da Vinci was the first artist to depict salad in his paintings. In the Leda, 1504, a child, standing next to the goddess of fertility, poses with a bouquet of lambs lettuce.
- ❖ The name lettuce is derived from the Latin word "Latucca," which refers to the vegetable's milky juice and it is believed that the Romans introduced it to Britain.
- ❖ The name Lamb's Lettuce was given to the leaf because of its resemblance to the size and shape of a lambs tongue. There is also a belief that it was so named because it is the favourite food of lambs (apparently in nature the first crop appeared around lambing time).
- ❖ Romaine is the American term for this long leafed lettuce, also called cos because it is said to have originated on the Greek Island of Cos (Kos), also the birthplace of the physician Hippocrates
- ❖ Romaine has been cultivated and eaten cooked or raw for almost 5,000 years and may very well be the oldest form of cultivated lettuce
- ❖ In ancient Egypt, lettuce was sacred to the fertility god Min and considered to be a powerful aphrodisiac. The first representation of salad appeared in paintings on Egyptian tombs in 4500BC.