

## Lettuce



**What is lettuce?** An annual plant of the aster or sunflower family. Most often grown as a leaf vegetable, but sometimes for its seeds and stems...lettuce comes in lots of different shapes, sizes, and flavors from arugula, Butterhead, endives, Iceberg, Red Leaf and Romaine...head lettuce and leaf lettuce.

**Selection:** To find the best lettuce, look for signs of appropriate freshness, e.g., for Iceberg and Romaine, lettuce leaves should be crisp, while other lettuce types should be softer. In most varieties, be sure to look for bright color (across the green spectrum), though remember that Red Leaf lettuce, will be red😊. Avoid heads of lettuce that are very hard or have bumps; as well as, any lettuce with tan or brown leaves and any decay or a sliminess to the leaf texture. Do note that pre-washed and bagged lettuce provides the same nutrition as loose lettuce, but it can be more expensive and not as flavorful.

**Storage:** Lettuce keeps well in plastic bags in the crisper section of the refrigerator. Some varieties (like Iceberg and Romaine) keep longer while others (think endives and Butterhead) keep fresh for shorter durations of time. One strategy is to purchase only as much as you need and then use immediately. Remember to store lettuces away from fruits like apples and bananas which release ethylene gas during the ripening process that can cause lettuce to spoil prematurely. Remove any insects that may have been hiding in lettuce that was purchased in a bunch.

**Nutrients/nutrition:** 1.5 cups of raw lettuce is one serving...and as a low fat (0 grams), low sodium (only 30 milligrams) and low calorie (~15 calories) this veggie tosses other nutrients your way... fiber, (~2 grams), vitamin A (166 micrograms or ~20% of daily value), vitamin C (3.7 milligrams or 4% of the daily value), and potassium (238 milligrams or 5% of daily value)...do note that the variety of lettuce will influence the its micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) and phytochemicals, but all lettuces are low calorie, low fat and low sodium. Evidence-based research shows that Romaine lettuce is a good source of lutein, a carotenoid that has been linked to eye health, offering protection against some age-related eye disorders.

**Preparation:** For all lettuce types, remove any browned, slimy or wilted leaves. Then wash and pat dry to remove dirt or insects. A salad spinner is an excellent tool for cleaning lettuce as it forces dirt to be removed from the leaves. Slicing lettuce with a knife can cause browning in lettuce, so if you do use a knife to prepare it for salad or grilling, then plan to consume it within a few days. While most folks think of lettuce as a great base for salads and therefore consumed in its raw form, lettuce can also be braised, steamed sautéed or grilled. For grilling, brush with olive oil and grill until the lettuce softens and begins to brown.

*Eat well to be well!*