



Tips for Eating More Fruits and Vegetables LETTUCE

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The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*¹ recommend that adults eat 1 ½ – 2 ½ cups of fruits and 2 –4 cups of vegetables a day to reduce the risk for diet-related chronic diseases. However, only 1 in 10 Americans eat the recommended amounts of fruits or vegetables.² There are many different ways to add a variety of fruits and vegetables to your diet. This publication focuses on lettuce and provides tips on how to select, store, prepare and preserve it.

Shopping Tips^{3,4}

- Lettuce is sold year-round, even though it grows in cold weather.
- Look for crisp lettuce that is clean at the ends and has a deep green color. The greener the lettuce, the more nutritious it is.
- Most grocery stores sell prewashed, bagged lettuce that can be easily used but are more expensive than whole heads of lettuce.

How To Clean and Store^{3,4}

- Store lettuce in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator.
- Lettuce spoils faster than most vegetables, so try to buy it close to when you plan to eat it. It should stay good about a week.

- If the lettuce is damp, wrap it in a dry paper towel to soak up some of the water. If the lettuce is dry, wet a paper towel a little before wrapping the lettuce.
- Do not store lettuce with apples, bananas, or pears, as these fruits release ripening hormones that will cause the lettuce to spoil faster.

How To Prepare^{3,4}

- If the lettuce is wilting when you want to prepare it, soak the leaves in a bowl of ice water for about 15 minutes to crisp them up again.
- Make sure to wash lettuce with cold water before eating it. After washing, pat dry using a paper towel or a dish towel. You can also use a salad spinner to remove water.



You can use a salad spinner to remove water from lettuce after washing it.

- You can cut lettuce or tear it with your hands. Having young children tear lettuce is a great way to have them help in the kitchen. Do not cut or tear too soon before serving, as the edges will brown quickly and the vitamin C content will begin to reduce.
- The most common way to eat lettuce is in a salad. Some people also like to make lettuce wraps. To make a lettuce wrap, use iceberg, romaine or butter lettuce instead of bread in a sandwich or instead of a tortilla in a burrito.

How To Preserve⁴

- Lettuce is best to eat fresh, when it is most nutritious and tasty. It does not freeze or dry well, and you cannot can it.
- Make your fresh lettuce last longer by storing it properly. Avoid squishing lettuce next to or under other food in the fridge. Keep lettuce away from the back of the fridge, where it might freeze.
- Use your senses to decide if the lettuce is still good. Avoid eating it if it smells bad, looks rotten or brown, or feels slimy.

Why Lettuce is Healthy⁶

There are many kinds of lettuce, but most lettuce contains nutrients your body needs to be healthy:

- **Vitamin K:** Helps blood to clot and wounds to heal.
- **Vitamin C:** Helps the body heal from bumps and bruises and fight infections.
- **Folate:** Helps make red blood cells and helps women have healthy pregnancies.
- **Vitamin A:** Maintains good vision, supports cell growth, and keeps skin healthy.

How it is Grown^{4,7}

- Lettuce is best grown in the spring and fall, with cooler daytime temperatures.
- Lettuce can be grown in almost any soil, as long as it has nutrients and holds water.
- Lettuce is easy to grow from seeds planted in rows just under the surface of the soil. Plant as soon as night temperatures remain above freezing.
- Water regularly, making sure the soil where the lettuce is planted remains moist, but not soggy.

Botanical Information^{4,7}

- The scientific name of lettuce is *Lactuca sativa*.
- Lettuce is native to Asia Minor and the Middle East.
- Lettuce plants are grown as annuals, meaning they only live for one year.

Fun Facts⁸

- In the United States, lettuce is eaten more than any other vegetable except potatoes and tomatoes.
- In ancient Egypt and Rome, people would eat lettuce at the end of dinner to make them sleepy, since wild lettuce back then contained a compound that acted like a sedative.



Green leaf lettuce



Butter lettuce with roots



Head lettuce

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