LETTUCES AND SALADS

HARVEST, SAVE AND SOW THEIR SEEDS

THE PRINCIPLE

A single lettuce allowed to complete its cycle can produce a large number of seeds.

IMPORTANT

Avoid F1 hybrids if you want to renew your seed reserve faithfully year after year.

Choose → Let bolt → Flower → Let ripen → Harvest → Dry → Extract → Clean → Store → Reseed

1 CHOOSE THE RIGHT VARIETIES

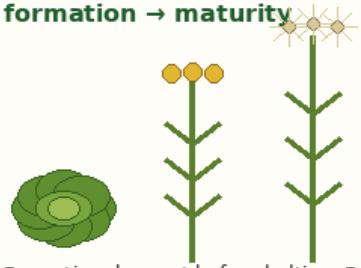
- Open-pollinated or reproducible varieties.
- Healthy, vigorous plants.
- Plants true to the variety.
- Well adapted to your soil and climate.
- Several plants if possible to preserve diversity.



2 LET A FEW PLANTS BOLT

To save seed, let a few plants complete their cycle:

head or rosette → stem growth → flowering → seed formation → maturity



For eating, harvest before bolting. For seed saving, let selected plants go all the way.

3 POLLINATION: TAKE CARE

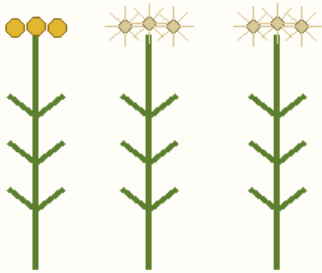
Lettuce is mainly self-pollinated, so crossing is less common, but it is still possible.

- Space different varieties if possible.
- Clearly identify seed plants.
- Do not mix seeds from different varieties.
- Write “open pollination” if conditions are not fully controlled.



4 RECOGNISE FLOWERING AND HARVEST TIME

Yellow flowers → faded flowers → white tufts → ripe seeds.



Harvest when white tufts appear and before the wind disperses the seeds.

5 HARVEST GRADUALLY

Ripening is staggered, so make several passes.

- Pick mature seed heads regularly.
- Or cut part of the stem when most seeds are ripe.
- Work preferably in dry weather.



6 EXTRACT THE SEEDS

When seed heads are fully dry, rub them gently between your fingers over a container.



You will get seeds, white tufts, flower fragments and plant debris.

7 CLEAN, SORT AND DRY

Remove the largest debris. Use a fine sieve or very light winnowing.



Seeds are tiny and light. Dry a few extra days if needed in a dry, ventilated place.

8 LABEL THE BATCHES

- species and variety
- harvest year
- origin or growing place
- pollination conditions
- any useful note

Lettuce - open pollinated

Harvest: 2026

Origin: Brittany

9 STORE

Use a paper envelope, labelled packet or suitable small container.



Keep seeds dry, cool, dark and stable. Avoid humidity, heat, direct light and large temperature changes.

10 HOW LONG?

Well dried and correctly stored, lettuce seeds can remain viable for several years.



2026 ✓
2027 ✓
2028 ?
2029 ?
2030 ?

Viability decreases over time. Test and renew batches regularly.

11 TEST BEFORE RESEEDING

When a batch starts to age, do a small germination test.

- Place a few seeds between two moist paper towels.
- Keep warm and in bright light, but not direct sun.
- Check every day.
- Record the percentage that germinates.



LETTUCES AND SALADS — KEY POINTS

- ✓ Choose open-pollinated varieties and healthy plants.
- ✓ Let a few lettuces bolt and flower.
- ✓ Watch for white tufts: seeds are nearly ripe.
- ✓ Harvest progressively before natural dispersal.
- ✓ Extract, clean and dry carefully.
- ✓ Label variety, year, origin and pollination.
- ✓ Store dry, cool and dark.
- ✓ Test germination as batches age.

THE CYCLE TO REMEMBER

Choose → Let bolt → Flower → Let ripen → Harvest → Dry → Extract → Clean → Store → Reseed

A lettuce can feed a meal today. Letting it complete its cycle can provide hundreds of seeds for tomorrow.