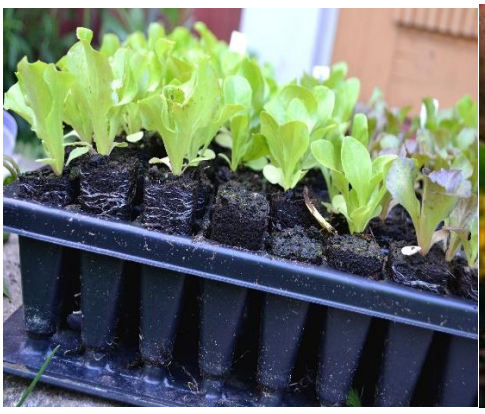
LETTUCE PLANTING GUIDE

NURSERY ESTABLISHMENT

- The plot should be well prepared by digging and mixing the soil with well decomposed farmyard manure.
- Poultry manure is not advisable to be used at the nursery level due to high nitrogen levels that inhibit proper seedling establishment.
- Drench the nursery bed with an insecticide and fungicide to prevent early attacks from soil borne pests and any fungal disease.
- For ease of nursery management practices such as weeding and irrigation, ensure the nursery bed is 1m wide and of a conventional length.
- Make shallow drills of 2cm - 3cm depth at a spacing of 10cm – 20cm apart. Thinly sow the seeds and cover them lightly using soil or well decomposed and fine farmyard manure.
- Irrigate the nursery bed frequently in the morning hours maintaining damp and not wet conditions. Seedlings are ready for transplanting after 3weeks. Allow some extra days for seedlings to harden.
- Alternatively, the seeds can be sowed using seeding trays with appropriate propagation media such as Peatmoss and Cocopeat.

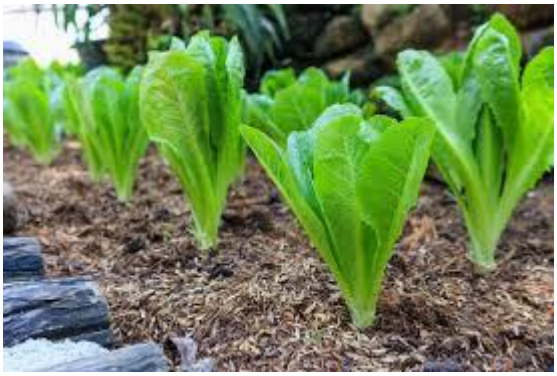


LAND PREPARATION

- Lettuce is a cool season crop that grows best within temperatures of $17℃ – 22℃$ during the day and $7℃ – 11℃$ during the night. It requires adequate sunlight, relatively cool nights and plenty of soil moisture for well-developed solid heads.
- Temperatures above $28℃$ affects head development which in turn leads to stem elongation / bolting hence reducing the plant's palatability quality.
- The crop grows well on a wide range of soils but performs best in fertile and well drained loam soils rich in organic matter with a pH of 5.5 to 7.0.

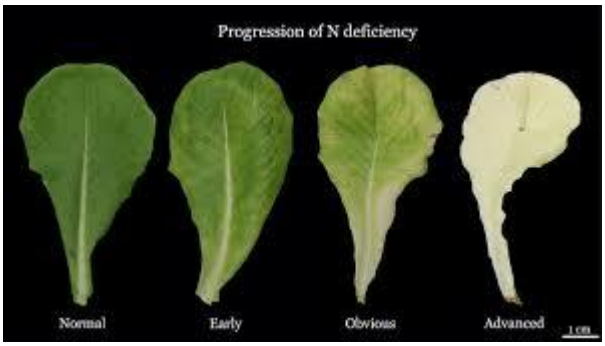
TRANSPLANTING

- Lettuce seedlings are ready for transplanting in 3weeks when they have 4-6leaves and a well-developed root system.
- The nursery bed should be watered for ease of uprooting the seedlings.
- Recommended transplanting hours are in the evening or when it is relatively cool to minimize risk of transplanting shock that arises from excessive evapotranspiration leading to permanent wilting which in turn makes the young seedlings dry up.
- For optimal production, a spacing of 25cm*25cm, 30cm*25cm or 30cm*30cm is recommended. Drench the planting holes with a fungicide and insecticide to prevent early attacks by fungal diseases and soil borne pests respectively.
- Mulching lettuce is also necessary especially when using overhead irrigation methods to keep heads free from soil splashes and conserve moisture in the soil.



NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENT

- During transplanting, it is important to have the planting holes mixed with well decomposed manure and a basal fertilizer rich in Phosphorous for proper root development such as D.A.P or N.P.K.
- Not only does manure improve on soil structure with low organic matter but also has a residual effect which benefits the next season's crop.
- Top dressing should be carried out 3weeks after transplanting with a basal fertilizer rich in Nitrogen such as NPK or CAN and a second application carried out 2-3weeks from the first top-dress.
- Depending on the nutrient levels of the soil, a third split might be necessary but it's a recommendation to have a soil test done to ascertain the exact fertilizer quantities that will be applied.



HARVESTING LETTUCE

- Lettuce are ready for harvest between 45-60days after transplanting but this also depends on the variety and purpose in which it was grown.
- Harvesting should be done in the morning hours or stored under a shade after harvesting since lettuce wilt rapidly. Cut off the heads using a sharp tool and remove diseased or dirty leaves.
- For proper delivery quality the lettuce heads should be stacked in crates and transported in refrigerated conditions for long distances.