Baby Leaf or Spring Mix

Baby leaf lettuces are grown at a very high density where the leaves are harvested at very young stage.

The leaves can be harvested, washed and pre-packaged in a leafy-green mixture that may include Japanese mustard (*Brassica campestris*), red mustard (*Brassica juncea*), tah tsai (*Brassica campestris*), multiple lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*) cultivars, spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), arugula (*Eruca sativa*) and Swiss chard (*Beta vulgaris*).

The most popular baby leaf varieties are ready to harvest between 28-35 days after planting and can be harvested repeatedly.

The beauty of a baby leaf salad is the combination of many different tastes and textures that range from sweet, soft, subtle or bitter.

While baby leaf salads are generally harvested by a machine, head lettuce is cut by hand. Producers aim to cool the salad leaves to 37°F within 2 hours of leaving the field.

When baby leaf salad varieties are ready for harvest, highly specialized harvesting machines with a capability of cutting over 15,000 Lbs. per hour are used.

Harvested leaves are transferred to state-of-the-art packing houses, the leaves are chilled, and packed into ‘sterile and ready-to-eat’ bags.

The baby leaf varieties are planted at extremely high seeding rates (up to three million seed per acre) and grown to the four- to eight-leaf stage.

Machine harvesting has reduced harvesting cost from 28 cents per pound to less than 1 cent per pound.

Harvesting speeds are about 3 mph.

In Spring mix and baby leaf varieties, there may be as many as 30 rows on the top of a wide, 84 inch bed.

Bed preparation is particularly critical for the baby leaf growers since these crops are usually mechanically harvested and the bed surface must be very level and smooth for the mechanical harvesters to work well and not get soil into the harvested crop.

Baby leaf crops on wide beds are typically irrigated using overhead sprinkler because of the high plant populations and the wide bed configurations.

The acreage in wide beds will continue to increase as growers continue to increase yields and reduce per unit production costs.

Many baby leaf varieties have heavier and slightly longer leaves to enhance harvest. Many baby leaf varieties are heat resistant and have the capacity to regrow rapidly for multiple cuttings.

The smaller, bite-size leaves and the convenience of washed, read-to-eat produce have made baby leaf salads more attractive to consumers.

Yuma County produced about 7,000 acres of baby leaf salad items in 2005.
In Yuma, planting starts the beginning of October and continues until the middle of February.

The convenience of pre-washed, pre-cut, bagged baby leaf salads has helped boost the bagged salads since 1998.

Bagged salads may have revolutionized the produce aisles of the supermarket as more prepared vegetables (diced onions, chopped celery) have started to appear alongside bagged salads, suggesting to consumers that they can have a wider variety of vegetables for cooking or sandwich making with very little work.

Sales of bagged salad mixes grew 20.5% between 2002 and 2005.

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