

OAK LEAF LETTUCE



Oak leaf lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), is primarily grown in Yuma County as an addition to the baby leaf packaged salad industry and averages about 50 planted acres. Oak leaf makes classy mixed salads and stays tasty even in drought and heat. The leaves are very attractive, distinctively lobed with the oak leaf shape. The plant is attractive with fairly tight rosettes of medium green leaves.

Oak leaf lettuce is a type of butter lettuce whose leaves are distinctively lobed. It can be used as a border accent in a garden and is found in a variety of red and autumn shades. Oak leaf can also be used as a garnish or can be cooked or stuffed, separated into leaves or served as mature hearts.

This vegetable is widely popular throughout the world and is readily available in supermarkets year round with hundreds of varieties to choose from. Iceberg used to dominate the selections but other varieties are now moving to the forefront.

The lettuce that we see today, actually started out as a weed around the Mediterranean basin. Served in dishes for more than 4500 years, lettuce has certainly made its mark in history with tomb painting in Egypt and identification of different types of lettuces by various Greek scholars. Christopher Columbus introduced lettuce to the new world and from that point, lettuce, as we know it, began in the US.

Most dark greens are good sources of Vitamin C, beta-carotene, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber. The rule of thumb is, usually, the darker the greens, the more nutritious the leaf.

Salad greens should not be stored near fruits that produce ethylene gases (like apples) as this will increase brown spots on the lettuce leaves and increase spoilage.

The oak leaf variety doesn't grow to form a typical lettuce head as in the Iceberg variety, but is instead the leaves are joined at the stem. Good examples of this lettuce include green leaf and red leaf.

The name of this plant, Oak Leaf, comes from the common chicory, a bushy perennial herb. In French it is called "feuille de chene" and it grows in areas characterized by Mediterranean and temperate climates. Oak leaf lettuce is a type of butter lettuce, with leaves that measure from 4 to 10 inches when allowed to mature. It has colorful borders of autumn and red shades and it can be used as a garnish. When buying oak leaf lettuce as a leaf lettuce this plant should have leaves which are curly, crisp and firm. Moreover, oak leaf lettuce does not keep for a long time and this is why it must be stored in the vegetable crisper of the refrigerator or in dark and cool place.

As far as the nutritional values are concerned, oak leaf lettuce is rich in minerals and vitamins A, vitamin B, vitamin C, vitamin D, and vitamin E. This type of lettuce goes well with any vinaigrette. For a tasty dish you could try placing a piece of grilled salmon on oak leaf lettuce, sprinkle with lemon juice and olive oil, lay peach slices on top, sprinkle with honey and oil, and sprinkle with walnut oil and walnuts.

Oak leaf lettuce is one of the most vigorous lettuces. In the Yuma area, it is primarily grown to be blended with other lettuces for the popular baby leaf spring mix salads, which is made up of several carefully selected baby lettuces and greens. They are picked, washed and packaged as whole leaves. Young and tender, they have that fresh flavor you get only from baby produce.

In recent years, the more nutritious, leaf-type lettuces have gained in popularity in US diets. All salad greens are low in calories and contain no fat or cholesterol. Leaf lettuces, such as oak leaf, contain as much as six times the Vitamin A and over three times the Vitamin C content as iceberg.

Medicinally, oak leaf is used as a mild sedative, with the added benefit of being easy on the digestive system. It has been used to treat colic and cough, and is also a mild diuretic and diaphoretic.

Wild lettuce probably originated in central Asia, but it is now grown throughout the world. Served in dishes for more than 4,500 years, lettuce has certainly made its mark in history as seen from tomb paintings in Egypt to identification of many different types of lettuces in ancient Greek relics by various scholars.

There are more than 100 varieties of lettuce and salad greens. This family contains many weeds of great importance in allergy, including ragweed.

The beauty of salads is that whether you're looking for sweet, soft, subtle or bitter flavors, there are many different tastes and textures that make a tasty meal on their own, or which can provide a wonderful base for a range of interesting ingredients.

Oak leaf lettuce does not keep for a long time (two or three days) so, it should be stored in the vegetable crisper of the refrigerator or in a cool, dark place. Salad greens should not be stored near fruits that produce ethylene gases (like apples) as this will increase brown spots on the lettuce leaves and increase spoilage.

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