

ROMAINE LETTUCE



Romaine lettuce had its start as a Mediterranean weed. As early as 55 B.C., Romaine lettuce was served on the tables of Persian kings and praised for its medicinal values. The name comes from Latin words referring to its milky juice found in the ribs of its leaves.

In Yuma County, Romaine lettuce is grown for Romaine hearts, whole intact heads and for use in packaged salads.

In 2005, over 20,000 acres of Romaine lettuce was grown in Yuma County and valued at roughly \$160 million.

Good-quality Romaine lettuce will have fairly large, moderately firm heads and thick leaves.

The leaves will be medium to dark-green in color blending to nearly white ribs or veins.

Large, even-shaped heads with broad, fairly loose leaves are considered by many to be the best.

This lettuce has gained tremendous popularity in the past decade as the key ingredient in Caesar salads. It has a loaf-like shape with darker outer leaves. Its strong taste and crispy texture has been favored by those who prepare salads.

Romaine lettuce is the most nutrient rich lettuce and one can tell this just by looking at it. Its darker color indicates it's more nutritious and more flavor as well. This dark leafy green contains lutein and zeaxanthin, carotenoids that help keep eyes healthy.

Romaine varieties of lettuce can be kept in a refrigerator for up to a week after purchase. Do not store lettuce next to bananas, apples, pears or tomatoes. The ethylene that these fruits give off will brown lettuce prematurely.

One pound of Romaine lettuce leaves equals roughly six cups.

Lettuce is one of the more popular vegetables in America, after the potato.

Romaine is the American term for this long leafed lettuce, also called cos or cos lettuce (mainly with those from Britain) because it is said to have originated on the Greek island of Cos (Kos), off the coast of Turkey in the Aegean Sea.

Romaine has been cultivated and eaten cooked or raw for almost 5,000 years and is probably the oldest form of cultivated lettuce.

Egyptian tombs reveal paintings of lettuce with long, pointed leaves, resembling Romaine.

A white latex oozes from its leaf base and the thicker ribs of older, larger leaves. This is reflected in the first syllable of its Latin name, *Lactuca*, which means milk. Lettuce juice was used as a medicine by many ancient herbalists.

Romaine is the second most important type of lettuce grown in Yuma County, iceberg lettuce being the first.

Romaine is a member of the daisy family *Compositae* which, although the second largest family of flowering plants, contributes only a few food plants (including also chicory, endive, escarole and dandelion). It is a cultivar of the common lettuce and is distinguished by an elongated head; dark green, long, narrow, crisp, stiff leaves and a coarse texture, with a distinctive rib almost to the tip of the leaf and especially on the older outer leaves.

The interior leaves of Romaine are paler in color, and more delicate in flavor. There is also a milder tasting variety with red tipped leaves and, a sweet romaine, which is even sweeter than regular romaine.

Romaine lettuce matures in roughly 70 to 75 days. It is slower to bolt (go to seed) than other varieties of lettuce, and also ships fairly well.

Many feel that soil grown Romaine has a much better flavor than Romaine grown in a greenhouse.

Avoid heads with an oversized stem base and older plants with large, strong milky ribs. Choose heads that are cut close to leaf stems and are free from browning.

Like all lettuces, Romaine has a vary high water content and very few calories (about 10 calories per cup).

Romaine is an excellent source of vitamin C, (more than 5 times that of iceberg lettuce).

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