VEGETABLES · A PATIO OR BALCONY IN COOL WEATHER

Let's grow leaf lettuce.

Lactuca sativa

This plan is for **Loose-leaf lettuce picked young; not four mature heads**

Four small plants. Pick a few leaves for lunch.

12 × 12 × 8 in. **8 seeds → 4 plants**

Before you start

Sow during a cool spring or fall spell. Four plants at 6-inch spacing are for young-leaf picking; use a different plan for mature heads.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 26, 2026 View sources ↗

LIGHT

Sun or light shade

Choose a bright spot; some afternoon shade helps as days warm.

WATER

Keep lightly moist

Young salad leaves do best without repeated drying out.

FEEDING

Starter feed first

Fresh enriched potting mix may cover your first small crop.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ One 12-inch square planter, at least 8 inches deep
- ✓ Fresh potting mix, a gentle watering can, and scissors
- ✓ 8 loose-leaf lettuce seeds, such as Salad Bowl

THE SOIL

Miracle-Gro Organic Potting Mix (US, with starter nutrients; check your bag for additional-feeding directions)

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

One pot. Here's the plan.

A patio or balcony in cool weather. Start with **seeds**.

THE POT

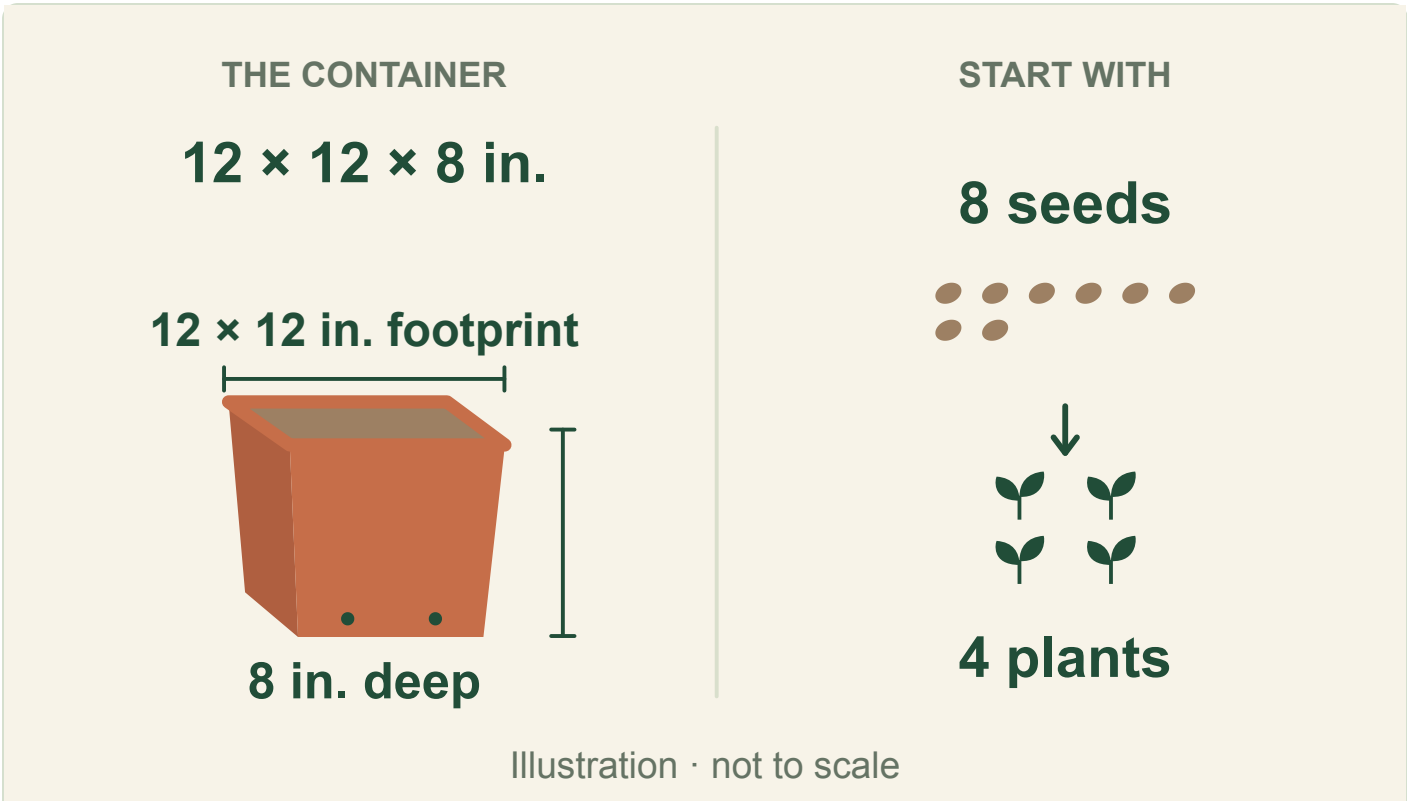
12 × 12 × 8 in.

One draining square planter, at least 8 inches deep. This layout is for picking young leaves, not growing four full-size heads.

HOW MANY

8 seeds → 4 plants

Four spots, 6 inches apart. Harvest young leaves, not big heads.



12 × 12 × 8 in. · 8 seeds → 4 plants One draining square planter, at least 8 inches deep. This layout is for picking young leaves, not growing four full-size heads. Four spots, 6 inches apart. Harvest young leaves, not big heads. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Wet the mix first

Fill the planter, leaving 1 inch below the rim. Water until the mix is evenly damp.

02

Sow four pairs

Mark a 2 × 2 grid with spots 6 inches apart. Put 2 seeds at each spot and cover with ¼ inch of mix.

03

Keep the surface from drying

Check the seed layer daily and sprinkle gently as needed. At 3–4 true leaves, snip the weaker seedling at each spot instead of pulling on neighboring roots.

04

Pick small, tender leaves

Keep 4 plants. Take a few outer leaves at a time and leave the center growing. This close layout is for young-leaf harvests.

Help with the setup: drainage holes and saucers · potting mix vs. garden soil.

Other ways to start

Buy small nursery starts

Plant 4 loose-leaf lettuce starts at the same four spots, with their root balls at the existing soil level. Choose individual young plants rather than squeezing a whole crowded nursery cell into each spot.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

Keep the seeded layer lightly moist. Once rooted, water when the surface starts drying; wet the deeper mix and let excess drain.

FERTILIZER

Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food (US 24-8-16)

AMOUNT

1 tablespoon in 1 US gallon of water

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

Mix into water. Apply only enough solution to wet this pot and drain; the mixing batch is not the amount to pour on.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

Only when additional feeding is due: every 14 days during active growth. Stop at harvest or when growth finishes.

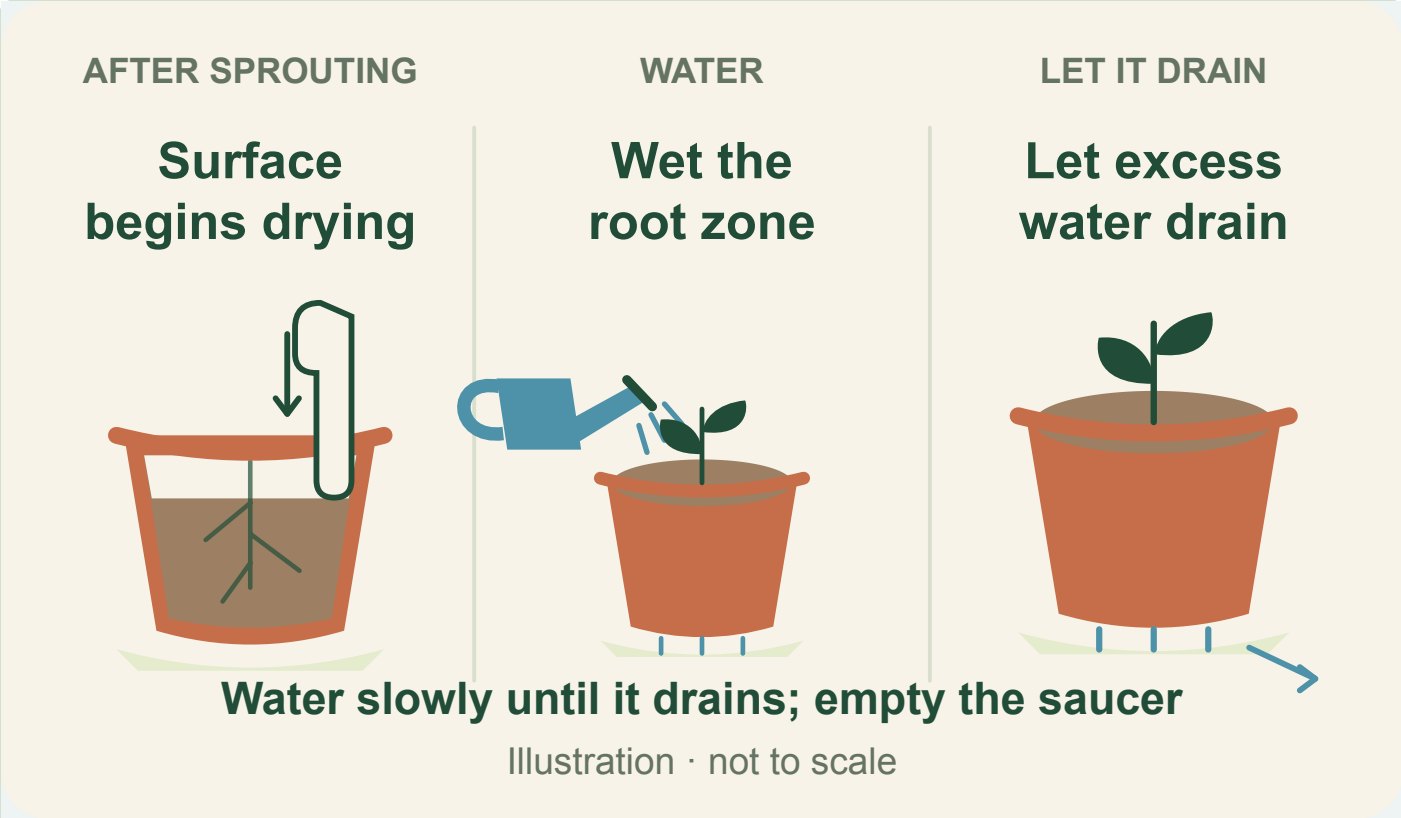
WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

Check your potting-mix bag before adding food. Fresh enriched mix may cover a short crop; do not stack full-rate feeds.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

Until seedlings emerge, check the seed spots daily and keep the ¼-inch-deep seed layer lightly moist. Sprinkle gently so the seeds stay put. Once plants have rooted, check each morning: when the surface starts drying, water the mix slowly until a little drains below. Skip watering while it is still damp. The aim is steady root-zone moisture, not a daily soaking or a fixed cup of water.



Check before watering. Keep the seeded layer lightly moist. Once rooted, water when the surface starts drying; wet the deeper mix and let excess drain. Original illustration; not to scale.

The easy rule

Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

Add no extra fertilizer at sowing in the fresh enriched mix listed here. Read your purchased bag's directions for when additional feeding begins. A short young-leaf crop may finish before more food is due; do not use a fixed two-month waiting rule or assume an unfertilized mix supplies the same starter nutrients.



1 tablespoon in 1 US gallon of water Mix into water. Apply only enough solution to wet this pot and drain; the mixing batch is not the amount to pour on. Only when additional feeding is due: every 14 days during active growth. Stop at harvest or when growth finishes. Check your potting-mix bag before adding food. Fresh enriched mix may cover a short crop; do not stack full-rate feeds. Original illustration; not to scale.

US PRODUCT REFERENCE



Miracle-Gro

Water Soluble All Purpose

24-8-16

Soluble: mix into water

Check the official US product ↗

Illustrated reference; check the manufacturer's current packaging and US label.

ONLY IF MORE FOOD IS DUE AND LEAVES ARE STILL GROWING

Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food (US 24-8-16)

If the bag says it is time for more food and the crop is still actively growing, mix 1 level tablespoon of Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food (US 24-8-16) in 1 US gallon of water. Apply at the roots every 14 days. Use only enough solution to wet this planter and drain; one gallon is a mixing batch, not a dose to empty into the pot. Delay if the mix is wet. Stop when the crop is finished or flowering, and do not stack full-rate fertilizers.

Check the manufacturer's product page ↗

The named US product's outdoor dilution is 1 tablespoon per US gallon. The 14-day interval is the slower end of its 7–14-day directions, not a crop-specific trial result. Follow your actual package; other products may differ.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

When to start picking leaves

Begin taking leaves when they are large enough to use, leaving plenty behind. Cool conditions and the seed variety affect the pace; a packet's baby-leaf estimate is more useful here than its full-head harvest date.

Choose a cool sowing window

Start in a cool spring or fall spell. Hot weather makes a fresh batch harder to establish and encourages flowering. Local planting windows matter more than a single month for the whole US.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

Something looking off?

Why does the lettuce taste bitter?

Heat and flowering can turn lettuce bitter. If the plant sends up a tall flowering stem, finish the crop and start again in cooler weather.

Can I grow four iceberg heads in this pot?

This recipe is for loose-leaf lettuce picked young. Full-size lettuce plants need more space; use a separate plan for iceberg or full-size romaine.

Why are the seeds not coming up in warm weather?

Hot mix can slow or prevent germination. Utah State gives 55–65°F as a useful germination range and notes reduced germination above 80°F. Check the seed-layer moisture and packet, then try a fresh sowing in a cooler spell. More fertilizer will not make a hot seedbed suitable.

Spacing seedlings and starting the next crop

Space four plants for young leaves

Four marked positions make sowing and thinning easy to follow. The 6-inch spacing is our container adaptation of young-leaf guidance, not a promise that four large, mature lettuces will fit.

Start a second pot for a later harvest

If you enjoy your first harvest, start another small pot while the first is still producing. Keep each sowing labeled so you know which crop is young and which is nearly finished.

Help with your next step.

Check the food already in your potting mix

Use your actual bag's directions to decide whether this short crop needs anything extra.

Compare beginner edible projects

Compare a rooted kitchen herb with a leafy crop grown from seed.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- University of Minnesota: leaf types, seed depth, and young-leaf spacing ↗
  https://extension.umn.edu/garden-and-home/yard-and-garden/gardening-in-minnesota/growing-lettuce-endive-and-radicchio
- Utah State University: lettuce growth and harvest ↗
  https://extension.usu.edu/yardandgarden/research/lettuce-in-the-garden
- University of Maryland: container growing ↗
  https://extension.umd.edu/resource/growing-vegetables-containers-and-salad-tables
- Manufacturer: starter feed in the named potting mix ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/potting-mix/miracle-gro-organic-potting-mix/78951430.html
- Manufacturer: US fertilizer formula and application directions ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/plant-food-and-care/miracle-gro-water-soluble-all-purpose-plant-food.html

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

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Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.