






Protected Lettuce

The protected lettuce industry grows year round to supply the UK with fresh lettuce 365 days per year from glasshouses or polythene clad structures. Varieties are bred to grow well in the short days of winter requiring little heat, whilst summer varieties are bred to cope with high temperatures. All varieties have a high level of disease and some pest resistance built in through the breeding programme.

The two most popular types of lettuce are Butterhead and Curly. These are slightly sweet, with a soft buttery texture. Increasingly available are "three heads in one" comprising a green and two red leaved varieties sold with or without the roots attached that offer a mixture of leaf shapes and colours.

Traditionally lettuces have been grown in the soil, sometimes planted through a polythene mulch to control weeds and moisture loss. This remains a common method that permits other crops to be grown in the rotation. Hydroponic systems are gaining favour as they produce a clean lettuce that grows without competition from weeds as well as very efficient use of water and fertilizers and energy. Lettuce grown in hydroponics can be sold with the roots intact that offers enhanced shelf life. In all cases the environment, temperature, ventilation etc are carefully controlled by computer to reduce pest and disease problems and produce a lettuce head that requires little trimming or waste.

	<p>Germination</p> 	<p>Planting stage</p> 
<p>Hydroponic trough growing</p> 	<p>Roots of a hydroponic grown plant removed from the trough</p> 	<p>Harvesting</p> 