

## KITCHEN INTELLIGENCE

# 18 Types of Lettuce and the Best Ways to Eat Each One

Your salads will never be the same.

BY ESTHER SUNG AND JOE SEVIER

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Photo and Styling by Joseph De Leo

Grouped under a larger category of salad greens, these vegetables are most often served raw, dressed and tossed with other salad ingredients. Whether you're using them raw or cooked, though, different types of lettuce can add quite a bit of texture and flavor to whatever you're making. If you do plan on cooking them, be sure to make it a quick sauté or wilting; anything else will cause the delicate greens to lose their unique characteristics. Remember, also, to wash them thoroughly, especially before eating them raw.

For clarification's sake, types of lettuces can be generally placed in one of four categories: looseleaf, butterhead, crisphead, and romaine. A prime example of a crisphead is [iceberg lettuce](#): its round head is made up of tightly packed, crunchy leaves. Butterheads are also round, but the leaves are more loose and have a smoother texture than those of their crisphead cousins. The elongated leaves of romaine and its thick white rib are its outstanding physical characteristics. As the name states, looseleaf lettuces are loosely gathered, growing as a rosette, enabling the grower to just remove the leaves rather than harvest the entire plant.

Not too long ago, some of these greens were deemed fancy or hard-to-find, but they have made their way into the mainstream and can now be found at local grocery stores and farmers markets. Many of these salad greens are also easy to grow yourself; for seeds and seedlings, consult your local gardening supply shop or an online source such as [Burpee](#).

Want to get to know each type of salad green? Here are the characteristics of a variety of popular types of lettuce:

## 1. Arugula





Puff Pastry Tart with Herbed Cheese and Arugula Photo by Chelsea Kyle, food styling by Katherine Sacks

**Alternate names/varieties:** Rocket, Italian cress, Mediterranean rocket, rugola, rugula, roquette, rucola

**Characteristics:** Originating from the Mediterranean, this green tastes earthy and slightly tart with a bold, peppery kick. The shape of an arugula leaf is similar to oakleaf lettuce, with rounded edges that undulate from broad to slight. The edges of baby arugula aren't as defined.

**How to use it:** Arugula can be eaten raw, in [bold-flavored salads](#); wilted into [pasta](#); cooked into a gratin; or blended into a pesto-like [spread](#).



## Pasta with Sausage and Arugula

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## Spring Greens and Leek Gratin

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## Arugula and Fava-Bean Crostini

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### 2. Butterhead lettuce





Photo by Shutterstock

**Alternate names/varieties:** Butter lettuce, Boston, bibb (limestone), Mignonette, Buttercrunch lettuce

**Characteristics:** A type of head lettuce, the leaves of Boston and bibb lettuces are soft. And as this variety's name implies, the texture of a butter lettuce is indeed smooth like butter. Bibb is the more expensive of the two and is often sold in a plastic container to protect the delicate leaves.

**How to use it:** The tender leaves of butter lettuce work best in [delicate salads](#), but their broad, flexible leaves can also be used as a [wrap](#).



## Spicy Chicken Lettuce Wraps

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## Bibb Lettuce, Chicken, and Cherry Salad With Creamy Horseradish Dressing

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### 3. Coral lettuce



[Breakfast Sandwiches With Chile-Fennel Sausage Patties](#) Photo by Dennis Prescott

**Alternate names/varieties:** Lollo Rosso, Lollo Bionda

**Characteristics:** Coral is a looseleaf variety and can be bright green, deep red, or speckled. The sturdy, crisp leaves have tight, frilly curls and a mild flavor.

**How to use it:** The tight curls of coral lettuce are adept at trapping dressing. The crisp but tender variety also makes a great sandwich or burger lettuce.





## California Veggie Sandwich

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### 4. Cress



**Watercress Salad With Warm Mustard Dressing** Photo by Chelsea Kyle, Prop Styling by Alex Brannian, Food Styling by Ali Nardi

**Alternate names/varieties:** Watercress, upland cress, curly cress, land cress

**Characteristics:** A peppery taste is characteristic of all varieties. Sold in bunches, mature watercress has a tough, fibrous stem and small green leaves (the stems of [baby watercress](#) are generally more tender). Be sure to wash all forms of cress thoroughly, since they often grow in sandy ground.

**How to use it:** Cress has a bold flavor, but delicate texture. Use it in a sophisticated-but-simple [side salads](#), toss them into a [saucy noodle dish](#), or use them to top a [spring pizza](#).





## Watercress and Persimmon Salad with Champagne Vinaigrette

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## Grilled Halloumi with Watercress

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### 5. Endive





Photo by Chelsea Kyle, Food Styling by Olivia Mack Anderson

**Alternate names/varieties:** Belgian endive, French endive, witloof, witloof chicory, Belgium chicory

**Characteristics:** Endive is a type of chicory. The unique oval shape, soft, satiny texture, and slight bitterness all mean it's a great addition to any salad. It's scooplike shape makes for edible servers, perfect for small appetizers.

**How to use it:** Tear individual leaves off a head of endive and serve on a crudité platter (they're great with [dip](#)), or fill them and place on a tray as [hors d'oeuvres](#). You can also serve the leaves whole, or [sliced](#) in salad.



## Endive, Romaine, and Orange Salad for Two

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## Endive with Tart Apple Dressing and Blue Cheese

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## Grand Aioli

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## 6. Escarole





Photo by Chelsea Kyle, Food Styling by Olivia Mack Anderson

**Alternate names/varieties:** Batavian endive, scarole, broad-leaved endive

**Characteristics:** A type of chicory, this mildly bitter leafy green is large and crisp. Escarole is often used in soups and paired with beans, reflecting its popularity in Italian cuisine.

**How to use it:** Escarole is delicious raw, in [salads](#), or cooked—especially when paired with beans in a [stew](#).



## Escarole with Italian Sausage and White Beans

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## Hot Honey Pork Chops with Escarole and White Beans

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## Wilted Escarole Salad

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### 7. Frisée





Photo by Chelsea Kyle, Food Styling by Olivia Mack Anderson

**Alternate names:** Curly endive, chicory endive, curly chicory

**Characteristics:** These curled leaves tinged with yellow and green are slightly bitter in taste, have a crunchy stem, and add a lot of texture. Their pale green, white, and yellow coloring is a result of the producer shielding them from light during the growing process. Frisée is closely related to escarole.

**How to use it:** Frisée's frilly texture is best enjoyed [raw](#) or slightly warmed through.



## Frisée and Carrot Ribbon Salad with Za'atar-Lemon Vinaigrette

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## Seared Duck Breasts With Blood Oranges

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### 8. Iceberg lettuce



[Little Wedge Salad With Sour Cream Dressing](#) Photo by Alex Lau, Prop Styling by Kalen Kaminski, Food Styling by Rebecca Jurkevich

**Alternate names/varieties:** Crisphead, [Reine de Glace](#), Igloo lettuce

**Characteristics:** Iceberg is known for being very crisp, watery, and refreshing. It forms in basketball-sized heads, with large, tightly packed, pale-green leaves.

**How to use it:** Iceberg lettuce is the gold-standard for a [chopped salad](#) or [wedge salad](#). It's also adds satisfying crisp, cool texture when shredded and stuffed into [tacos](#), [subs](#), and [fried fish sandwiches](#).





## Iceberg Salad with Italian Dressing

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## Grilled Bacon BLTs

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### 9. Little Gem lettuce





**Little Gem Wedge Salad With Tahini Ranch** Photo by Stephen Kent Johnson, Prop Styling by Kalen Kaminski, Food Styling by Rebecca Jurkevich

**Alternate names:** Sucrine, Sugar Cos, baby gem

**Characteristics:** Although Little Gem lettuce resembles baby romaine, it's actually a full grown variety. The leaves are crisp, sweet, and sturdy.

**How to use it:** Its small stature means the leaves are ready to be tossed whole into a [salad](#). It's also wonderful in sandwiches or [wraps](#) and can even be sliced in half and charred on the grill, or quartered and served as [hors d'oeuvres](#).



## Little Gem Salad with Buttermilk Chaas

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## Green Bean and Tuna Salad with Basil Dressing

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### 10. Looseleaf lettuce



Photo by Shutterstock

**Alternate name/varieties:** Batavia lettuce, leaf lettuce, green leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuce, Redina

**Characteristics:** They have a mild flavor and are very pliable, despite the crunchy stem. Their uneven ruffled surfaces add layers of texture to salads.

**How to use it:** Looseleaf lettuce can go wherever you want it to go. Because the leaves are so large, it's best to tear them up into bite-size pieces for salad. They're also great puréed into soup (yes, [soup](#)); and the broad, tender leaves combined with the sturdy rib make for exceptional lettuce wraps.





## Green Leaf Lettuce, Pomegranate, and Almond Salad

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## Classic Smashed Cheeseburger

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### 11. Mâche





**Alternate names:** Field salad, lamb's lettuce, corn salad, field lettuce, fetticus

**Characteristics:** Sometimes sold with its soil still attached, this salad green imparts a mild and slightly sweet flavor to a salad. Because of the small size of the leaves, trying to create a whole salad with a base of mâche can be expensive. Its leaves are also very delicate and will bruise easily, so handle with care.

**How to use it:** This tender green is best reserved for special occasion salads.



## Mâche Salad with Blood Oranges, Pistachios, and Pomegranate

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## Mâche Salad with Creole Vinaigrette

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## 12. Mesclun





Photo by Chelsea Kyle, food styling by Katherine Sacks

**Alternate names:** Mixed baby lettuce, spring mix

**Characteristics:** Mesclun is not a specific type of lettuce, but rather a loose mix of tender baby lettuce leaves. The mix might contain any number of lettuce varieties, as well as baby spinach or [other baby greens](#).

**How to use it:** Pre-packaged mesclun mixes can be [hit-or-miss](#); so if you're looking for a variety, it might be best to choose a few different types on this list and mix them together once you're home.



## Everyday Greens Salad

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## Baby Greens, Pear, Walnut, and Blue Cheese Salad

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### 13. Oakleaf lettuce



Photo by Shutterstock

**Alternate name:** Oak leaf

**Characteristics:** The shape of this butter lettuce's leaves are similar to that of the oak tree, thus, its name. From a distance, one could mistake it for red leaf and green looseleaf lettuce, but a closer look will reveal differences in shape and texture: this type of lettuce has leaves that are a little shorter and more squat, and the tops of their leaves have a softer texture than their red leaf and green leaf counterparts.

**How to use it:** This delicate, tender lettuce acts a great bed for other ingredients and won't compete with other flavors.





## Escarole, Fennel, and Oak-Leaf Salad

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## Wilted Greens Soup with Crème Fraîche

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### 14. Radicchio



Photo by Chelsea Kyle, Food Styling by Olivia Mack Anderson

**Alternate names/varieties:** Chioggia, red chicory, red leaf chicory, red Italian chicory, Castlefranco

**Characteristics:** Pronounced "rah-dick-ee-yo," you can find this deep-red-purple vegetable sold either as a compact round head, as pictured above, or shaped like its relative, endive. The bright coloring makes it stand out.



**How to use it:** For lovers of bitter lettuce, this essential chicory is crisp and velvety when eaten raw. It can be a stand-alone [salad green](#), or mixed with other [chicories](#) or sweet lettuces. When [cooked](#), the red-purple hue turns brown and what was once bitter becomes sweet.



## Radicchio Salad with Sour Cream Ranch

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## Seared Radicchio and Roasted Beets

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### 15. Romaine lettuce





Romaine Salad With Rye Crisps and Lemon-Pecorino Vinaigrette Photo by Johnny Miller

**Alternate name:** Cos lettuce

**Characteristics:** This large leafy lettuce is stiffer than most; a thick center rib gives it a real crunch. The rib also gives this lettuce a slight bitter taste. This is the lettuce originally used when the Caesar salad was created.

**How to use it:** Call on romaine whenever you want superior crunch from your greens or a sturdy variety that can [stand up to the grill](#).



## Caesar Salad

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## Grilled Lettuces with Crème Fraîche and Avocado

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### 16. Speckled lettuce





Photo by Chelsea Kyle, food styling by Katherine Sacks

**Alternate Name:** Speckled trout lettuce, Thorburn's orchid lettuce

**Characteristics:** Many varieties on this list, including romaine, looseleaf, and butterhead could all come with a speckled pattern on its leaves. The bold coloring usually indicates that the lettuce in question is an heirloom or cross-breed variety.

**How to use it:** Keep these leaves whole or tear them into large pieces and toss in a salad that shows off their unique appearance.

## 17. Stem lettuce





Photo by Chelsea Kyle, Food Styling by Rhoda Boone

**Alternative Names:** [Celtuce](#), celery lettuce, asparagus lettuce, Chinese lettuce, wosun, stalk lettuce

**Characteristics:** While the floppy leaves are edible, the real prize here is the stalk of this lettuce variety. The leaves can be bitter, like escarole, but the stalk, which should be peeled, has a nutty, cucumber-like flavor.

**How to use it:** The leaves can be eaten like any other lettuce variety: raw or wilted into soups. The stalks can be sliced thin and eaten raw or added to a [stir-fry](#), grilled, or cooked any way you might prepare asparagus or broccoli stems (such as in a [frittata](#)).

## 18. Other salad greens



Photo by Chelsea Kyle, food styling by Katherine Sacks

**Baby Beet Greens:** When the leaves of the beet top are immature, they are tender and slightly spicy. The purplish-red veins are visually striking and can dress up any salad. When wilted, the veins become brighter in color and a little bit sweeter.

**Mizuna** (aka Japanese greens, spider mustard, xue cai, kyona, potherb mustard, and California Peppergrass): This Japanese mustard green is typically sold as part of a premade salad mix but can be purchased loose at the farmers market or specialty shop. Mizuna has a relatively strong, spicy flavor when compared to other salad greens, but its flavor won't overpower a dish. The small jagged edges that make mizuna look like miniature oak leaves add a lot of texture.

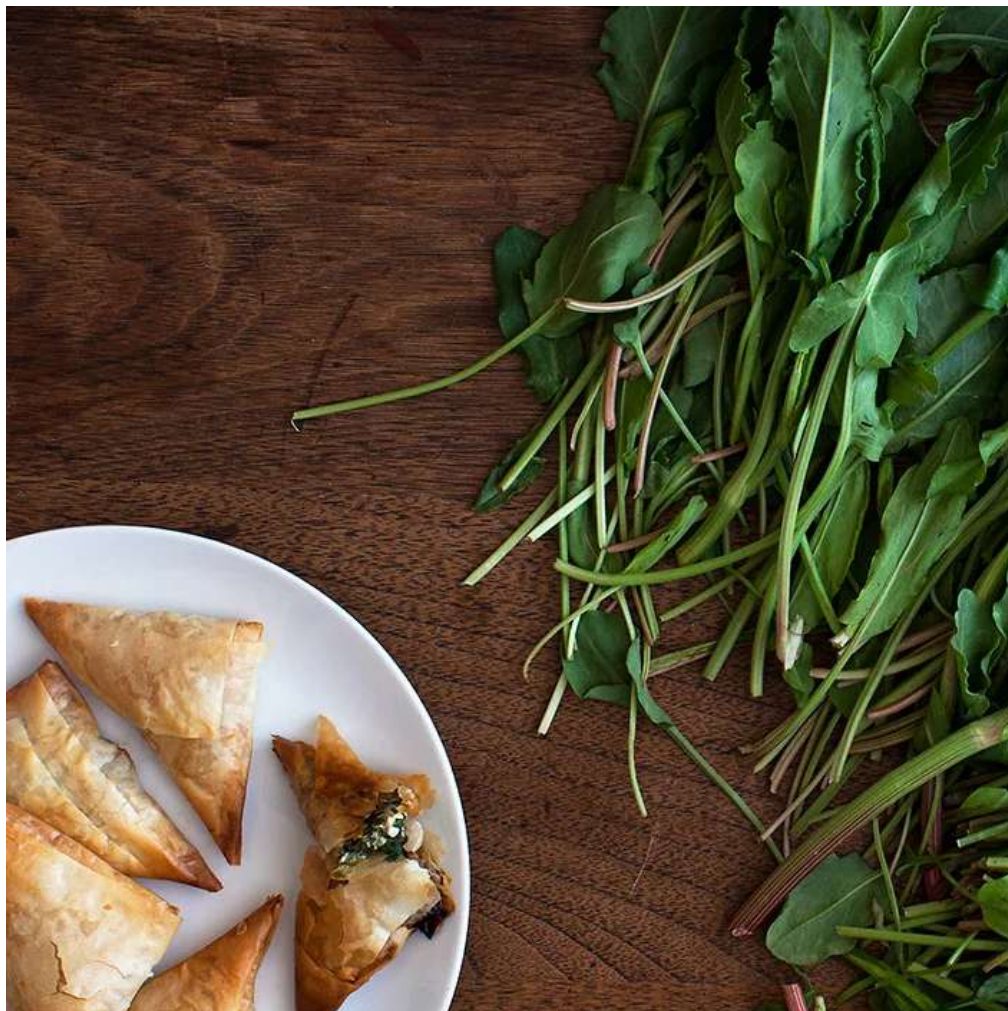




## Stir-Fried Bok Choy and Mizuna with Tofu

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**Sorrel:** Technically classified as an herb, sorrel (pictured above) is a wonderful addition of any salad. The bright green leaves are tart and quite lemony. They may have a bright red rib with a web of red veins shooting out to the sides.



## Spinach and Sorrel Spanakopita

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**Tatsoi** (aka tat soi, spoon cabbage, rosette bok choy): The small, rounded leaves of this salad green have a mild, mustardlike flavor. The texture is similar to that of baby spinach, and one can be swapped for the other. Baby tatsoi is usually sold loose, but when mature, tatsoi can be purchased whole, in the shape of a rosette, and it is often cooked intact in stir-fries. Like mizuna, tatsoi is often available only at the farmers market or specialty gourmet shops.





## Spring Greens with Quick-Pickled Vegetables

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**Escarole**

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