



Celebrating 22 Years!

ask the landscape professional
Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

EMAIL OR MAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:
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Give us a call if we can be of service!

QUESTION THIS WEEK:

I grew lettuce in a pot on my porch last summer, but by the third month it had gotten really tall and the leaves became bitter. How do I prevent this? -Jillian

Linda's Answer:

Dear Jillian,

While lettuce is an easy to grow vegetable that is quite satisfying when fresh from your own garden, it unfortunately does not have a very long life span. What you described is called "bolting," when the lettuce plant has had enough of producing leaves and is ready to flower, make seeds, and die off. You will know your lettuce is starting to bolt by a sort of thick stem that starts to grow out of the center of the plant. Once this stem starts growing, you can pick off it for another day or two before your lettuce is kaput and you will need to re-plant. Bolting causes the whole plant to become bitter and unpalatable. If you choose to grow lettuce between June and early September, you will want to check your plants daily for signs of bolting.



Lettuce

Now, while most garden centers will sell lettuce seedlings that you can easily transplant into your own pots or garden at home, they generally stop doing so around mid-June, as lettuce is a vegetable that likes the cooler weather. You CAN grow lettuce all summer, however, as long as you pick up a packet or two of lettuce seeds and are willing to re-plant new seeds every 3-4 weeks or so throughout the summer. This will keep you in fresh lettuce most of the year, especially if you are growing on a small scale. Lettuce seeds are tiny, so there are a lot of them in one little packet! I suggest you plant only 2 or 3 seeds per pot (or 2 seeds every 8-10 inches), to give the lettuce space to grow. It may also be a good idea to plant leaf lettuce instead of head lettuce, as you can pick what you want off each plant from the time it is established until it bolts, as long as you leave a center stalk and enough leaves to give it time to grow more.

Good luck, and happy salad-making!

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 22 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

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