

CHINESE LETTUCE 萵苣 (萵仔葉、生菜)

93-1-8

(*Lactuca sativa*, L. var. asparagine)

(Other Names: Stem Lettuce, Celtuce,
Asparagus Lettuce)

Chinese lettuce is very popular in China, but not in the west. The main edible part is the fat stem rather than the leaves as in it's Western counterpart. It is called Stem Lettuce, one of five types (Butterhead, Cos, Crisphead, and Leaf) of Western lettuce groups. In 1938, W. Atlee Burpee Seed Co. introduced it to the United States and named it Celtuce from the combination of first part of "celery" and "lettuce". Use stem as celery and use young leaves as lettuce. Botanically, it has no relationship with celery.



The mature plants of Chinese lettuce grow up to 2 feet high with large leaves. The stem is thick and bright green in color. The diameter of stems may grow up to 2 inches. Immature stems which are tender are cooked as vegetables. The leaves can be used for cooking when they are young.

HOW TO GROW: The germination of seeds is not easy and the successful growth of the thick stem is dependent on strong and healthy seedlings. Therefore, it is advisable to start seeds indoors by sowing in a tray or flat. Sow seeds thinly and evenly. Cover seeds about 1/2 an inch with vermiculite or perlite. Seeds germinate in 5-10 days. Then replant in a bigger tray or in peat pots. When seedlings grow 3 or 4 leaves, transplant into garden, 2 feet apart between the rows and 1 foot apart between plants in the row. For better results, use some compost or well-rotted animal manure if handy.

WHEN TO PLANT: Like American lettuce, Chinese lettuce is extremely sensitive to high temperature. When temperatures are above 80°F seeds do not germinate. High temperatures induce a seed stalk. Start seeds indoors in early spring or fall and transplant to garden when the weather is cool. In spring transplant to garden about a month before the last frost date. In fall seeds may be sowed in garden.

CARE AND HARVEST: Chinese lettuce needs proper watering in the early stage of development. If lacking water, the plant will grow slow and will be shorter than average. During the later stages, if the soil is too dry or too wet it may cause the stem to crack. Cultivate and fertilize every 3 weeks. All cultivation around lettuce should be shallow, due to it's meager root system. During cultivation pull some soil to the base of the plants.

During growing you may remove some leaves from the lower part of the stem for cooking. However, this practice may affect the stem development. Therefore keep the leaves on the plant until they turn yellow. When plants are about 1 foot high, approximately 60 days after planting, harvest by cutting the entire plant near the ground. Remove and discard the old leaves at the lower part of the plant. The leaves at the upper part can be used for cooking.

VARIETY: There is only one variety.

USES: Stem can be eaten raw in salad or cooked with meat or other vegetables. The Chinese pickle the stem, which can be stored for a long time. Young leaves can be treated as leaf lettuce for salad or cooked.

RECIPES:

1. Simple Stem Lettuce Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 lb Stem lettuce. Peel and wash, sliced into 1 inch pieces.
- 1 tsp Salt
- 1 tsp Soysauce
- 1 tsp Sesame oil

Procedure:

1. Add salt to sliced lettuce in a bowl. After 1 hour squeeze the juices from the lettuce.
2. Add soysauce and sesame oil. Mix well and serve