

Tossing Around the Idea of Growing Your Own Greens?

October 2009

by Annie Plowman

The sprouting green vegetables in my garden thrill me! The radishes and the carrots are sprouting. I also see new sprouts coming up for the salad greens that I planted. That's what I'm writing about today. Lettuces! I dig fresh, home-grown greens.

Like I said before, many of the best vegetables thrive in cooler temperatures. Lettuce is one of those super-easy tasty treats. The best choices; I say because they are easy and nutritious, are the loose leaf varieties. I am growing romaine from seed and also a "salad mix". These will keep producing for you as you continue to harvest from the same plant. Head lettuces are harder to grow. Iceberg is far less nutritious and you don't get the same abundance in harvest as you do with the loose leaf varieties.

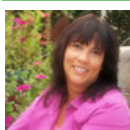
Romaine is best harvested when fairly young and tender. This is done by cutting off the outer leaves at the base of the plant. Then wait for the next round because, it will keep producing for months to come! Remember also, that Romaine will perform better if not crowded. Don't plant them on top of each other and thin out the plants if you find you have too many that are close together. If left to age, you may find the greens to be somewhat stiff and strong in flavor so, harvest young. The salad mixes are nice too because those also can be harvested again and again until the weather heats up. Simply cut them off leaving about ½ inch at the base of the plant. Note: If a harsh freeze comes in the winter, it's not a bad idea to throw a "frost cloth" over the top of your greens for the night.

There are many loose leaf lettuces to choose from. You may choose a bibb or butter leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuces, romaine etc. I like to mix it up and have some fun with it. Many varieties are available at your local garden center not only in seed but in jumbo (six) packs. Don't worry about having more plants than you need. Exercise your generosity and share your abundance with friends. Remember, you are still probably going to be dollars ahead.

Another way to make your salads fun is with pansies. Pansies are edible and make a beautiful, colorful addition to your salad. They have a slightly peppery flavor. Have your children pick their favorite colors and mix those in with your plantings. I will be making a few little pots in the coming weeks to give as Christmas presents and hostess gifts for those holiday visits. The pots will include some lettuce, pansies and radishes that are ready to harvest at Christmas. You can assemble a cute edible arrangement, snap on a bow and have a unique, inexpensive gift that your friends will remember and appreciate. (Please keep in mind that not all flowers are edible... Always know what you are putting in your mouth is safe for you and your family.)

I've already spoken about importance of a good quality "potting" soil for your containers. It's still important. It also makes a big difference if you use an organic vegetable (or starter) fertilizer with mycorrhizae. I hope you don't neglect those steps because I really want you to be successful and I want to hear all about it. When you are doing a project with children, you also know how important it is to have great results so, don't cut corners on the important supplies.

I wouldn't be finished if I didn't mention snails again. Protect your harvest! Use people-and-pet-safe snail bait. This is readily available at a good garden center and snail protection is totally necessary even if you have your vegetables in containers. I am trying something new this year. I am going to use the self adhesive copper snail tape on a few test areas. Apparently many gardeners have used this method for a long time. The tape is found at most garden centers. It is applied in a strip (as a band) around the outside circumference of the pot. The snails just don't like dragging their creepy, little, slimy bodies over the top of the copper tape. Being that I am using recycled plastic containers, I thought I'd give this copper tape method a whirl.



Annie Plowman is a Customer Service Representative with Belmont Nursery in Fresno. Anne has many years experience gardening and in the nursery industry. You can reach her at annie@belmontnursery.com

 **Belmont
Nursery**
The "Go-To" Place for Plants!
WWW.BELMONTNURSERY.COM