



# Sensational Salads

## Common Salad Greens

Salad greens are incredibly diverse in taste and texture, providing a distinct base for different types of salads. Below you will find a list of these highly perishable foods that includes information about common types of salad greens and what distinguishes their taste and texture.

### Butterhead Lettuce

A head lettuce with Boston and Bibb lettuce being the most common. The distinct characteristics include a small, loosely packed head with soft buttery-textured leaves. Bibb lettuce was named after John Bibb from Frankfort who cultivated the variety. It is more expensive than Boston lettuce and is especially popular during Derby time. If you can't find it in your local produce section, ask for it because it is sometimes shelved in small quantities because of its delicate leaves. You might also find it in a plastic container for added extra protection. Butterhead lettuces have a mild flavor and are softer in texture than other lettuces. This is the preferred lettuce for use in lettuce wraps.



### Iceberg Lettuce

A compact head lettuce with solid, crisp leaf texture. Its name came about when growers from California packed the heads in ice to help preserve the produce when shipping. Look for a heavy, compact head when selecting. A light head could indicate loss of moisture. Iceberg lettuce has a very mild to neutral flavor and outsells all other salad greens combined in the United States.



### Green Leaf Lettuce

Includes broad, curly loose leaves such as oak leaf and lollo rosso lettuces. The leaf shape is quite variable with some resembling the leaves of an oak tree, hence the name. It has a mild, delicate flavor with a slightly crisp texture.



### Red Leaf Lettuce

Similar characteristics to green leaf lettuce but has larger, thicker leaves and is medium to dark red in color. It has a mild flavor and slightly crisp texture.



### Romaine Lettuce \rō-mān\

Oblong head lettuce with large, slightly stiff leaves. The center stem or rib gives it support and adds a crunchy texture. While the leaves are mild in flavor, the stem can sometimes be bitter, especially on a more mature head. This lettuce is commonly used for Caesar salads.



### Arugula /ə-'rū-gə-lə/

Sometimes referred to as rocket lettuce; grows in a low and compact rosette of leaves. It originated in the Mediterranean. When used in salads, it adds color and a kind of peppery flavor. Some people might even refer to it as bitter depending on their palette. Because of the flavor, it is often served in mixed green salads.



### Cabbage

Different from lettuce because it grows on a stem and forms a compact head of waxy leaves. Depending on the variety, it can be green, red, or purple in color. Great in salads as it adds a crisp texture and might add a somewhat sharp taste depending on the variety and growing conditions. Red and purple cabbage also add beautiful color and contrast to a normally green dish and have a slightly stronger flavor than green cabbage.



## Nappa or Chinese cabbage

Milder than green cabbage, it has distinct yellowish-green frilly leaves making it a beautiful variation to salads.



## Radicchio \ra-'di-kē-ō\

Commonly mistaken for red or purple cabbage, but one bite and you will recognize the difference. Also referred to as Italian chicory, it is a compact head with a white stem and red leaves. It has a spicy, bitter taste but is a great way to add a layer of varying taste to a green salad. It can be quite pricey during certain times of the year and is found commonly in cold salads.



## Spinach \spi-nich\

While there are different types of spinach, most grocery stores carry the flat, smooth leaf variety. If you see a leaf that is slightly crinkled or dark green and curly, it is a different variety. Baby spinach is best for salads as the leaf can become tougher as it matures. Most of the mature leaves are used for steaming or canning.



## Chard \chärd\

Also called Swiss chard, has shiny green, ribbed leaves with stems that can be white, yellow, orange, pink, or red depending on the variety. Young tender leaves are more palatable in salads. Chard might have a slightly bitter flavor.



## Chicory \'chi-k(ə-)rē\ or Frisee \'frē-zā\

Distinguished by narrow, curled leaves can be tinged with yellow and green if the producer shielded them from light during the growing process. Chicory adds a nice, crunchy texture because of the stem and can have a slightly bitter taste. This green pairs well with cheese and/or citrus.



## Escarole \'e-skə-,rōl\

Resembles lettuce but has wide pale green leaves and is part of the Chicory family. Slightly bitter in taste.



## Kale

One of the most popular greens on today's market. It is a form of cabbage and has similar characteristics, such as the waxy smooth texture, but the center does not form a head. Kale can come in a variety of colors ranging from light green through dark green, violet, and violet brown. There are two types: curly or lacinato/dinosaur. Baby kale and some varieties are particularly tender. Kale is excellent in salads because it has a crunchy texture and bold taste.



## Watercress

Small, crisp member of the mustard family that's slightly bitter with a hint of pepper. Delicious in salads; also good in sandwiches and soups.



Many of these salad greens are crops that grow well in Kentucky. Most salad greens are cool weather crops that grow best in the spring and fall. For more information about growing, fertilizing, and harvesting specific salad greens in Kentucky, read the Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers (<http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID36/ID36.pdf>) developed by the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

## References

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